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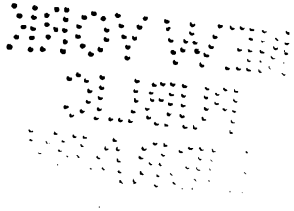

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BOOK I

"Her Highness the Princess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka!" shouted the servant at the top of his sonorous bass voice, as he threw open the second wing of the folding-doors.

The announcement created a sensation in the crowded room. The ladies who were seated turned their heads round, and in great excitement lifted their lorgnettes to their eyes. The men who lined the walls stood on tip-toe. Two reporters asked their neighbours in a whisper to repeat the name, and hastily wrote it down in their notebooks. Madame Abeille, the hostess, left two ladies whom she had scarcely finished greeting, with scant ceremony, flew through the crowd which divided to let her pass, to meet the new-comer.

"My dear princess," she said, "how are you? I feared something had kept you from coming."

"Yes, my dear friend," answered the princess, "we are a little late. I was uncertain up to the last. It is the first time I have been out since my year of mourning. But I wanted to give you my first evening."

"Thank you, princess, thank you," replied Madame Abeille. "Ah, good evening, my dear Prince Siegfried. It is charming of you to come with the princess."

"Madam——" murmured the prince, while he bowed somewhat stiffly and offered his hostess his finger-tips.

"Let me introduce my little *protégée*," said the

princess. "Mademoiselle Nicoline Flammert, the daughter of an old Diesa friend who has asked me to show her something of Paris."

Her hostess glanced at the girl who, blushing, stepped forward with a slight bow.

"I congratulate you, my dear young lady, on your chaperon. And still more on your youth and beauty," she added with a polite smile. "Will you be so good as to come with me?"

Madame Abeille walked in front. There was a good deal of pushing and squeezing, disguised by such polite phrases as, "I beg your pardon," "Can you make a little room?" "I'm so sorry to disturb you," "If you please." In this way the little procession reached the front row of seats, in the midst of which an empty armchair awaited an occupant.

"We'll find a place for you directly, Mademoiselle Flammert," said her hostess, before the girl had time to feel embarrassed.

Beckoning to a young man, she whispered a few words in his ear. He vanished behind the row of black-coated guests who lined the walls, and quickly returned with a low, green varnished chair of a modern style, and placed it on the left of the armchair, just a little in front of the line.

The Princess had meanwhile seated herself, and her hostess introduced her to her right-hand neighbour.

"Allow me—the Princess of Cyprus, her Highness the Princess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka." Then pointing to the stool, she said, "There, Mademoiselle Flammert, you see there's space for a rose-leaf even in a closely crowded room." With a smile and a nod, Madame Abeille retired.

The two princesses glanced quickly and sharply at each other, and exchanged bows. The Princess of Cyprus's greeting was a little hasty, that of her Highness lacked eagerness and was almost hesitating. The politeness of the two ladies went no further, although they secretly eyed each other.

The young man whom the hostess had addressed as Prince Siegfried, joined the group of men who were

standing. He evidently knew none of his neighbours, for no hand went out to him, no smile greeted him, no word nor recognition was vouchsafed him.

The programme was fairly well advanced. Two poets had recited; the charming Blanchon of the Comédie Française, and Saint-Denis, the star of the Gymnase, had acted a little play. Now came the chief attraction of the evening. It was a novelty, if not invented by Madame Abeille, developed by her, and brought to the level of a recognized drawing-room entertainment. It consisted of a speech on some question of the day, followed by the reply of a supporter of the opposite view. In the open space in front of the rows of seats to which screens arranged at the back and sides lent a sort of likeness to a stage, were two armchairs. Two young men, one with a cornflower in his button-hole, the other with an orchid, entered, bowed to the audience, smilingly acknowledged the applause with which they were received, and sat down. Then one of them began to speak freely and surely, while the other leaned back carelessly, crossed his legs, and apparently hypnotized by the sharp points of his shining patent leather shoes, showed agreement or disagreement, with an elegantly restrained, yet sufficiently plain gesture and expression. The subject of discussion was a burning one: The organization of Society on an aristocratic basis or on one of democratic equality. The supporter of the motion defended the necessity of grades in Society; his opposer took democracy under his wing with a sort of indulgent condescension; both spoke in indignation of the power of money, and in bitter scorn of its human representatives. That was in good taste here, for Madame Abeille's late husband had been a banker, and many of the ladies present bore names of a provokingly financial sound. Neatly turned compliments, epigrams, witticisms, and bold paradoxes were scattered through the alleged extempore debate. It was a free imitation of the speeches which it is customary to make at the reception of a new member into the French Academy, and the disputants, both young writers, whose ambition taught them to value the patronage of influential women, seemed to regard the performance as

good practice for the parts they would in the future play in the Academy.

Few of the audience, and especially few of the ladies, followed the speaking for more than five minutes. To speak truthfully, it was very tedious. The extreme pleasure and self-satisfaction which the two orators apparently found in hearing themselves speak afforded a little amusement. But Madame Abeille had issued a decree that a speech-tournament was an intellectual pastime, and one of a far higher tone than the entertainments of ordinary superficial society, and so the company bored itself out of politeness.

The orators had sufficient tact not to indulge their pleasure in talking for too long a time. With a last harmless display of wit, and some well-turned flattery, having smilingly shaken hands and bowed to the audience, the two young men advanced into the room, amid clapping of hands and rustling of fans, and a chorus of "bravo," "delightful," "very nice."

Many ladies rose, and either alone, or accompanied by a gentleman, went into the next room where a buffet, shining with glass and silver, was spread with champagne, ices, fruit syrups, cakes and sandwiches. The princess, with a curt bow to her neighbour, stood up and followed the others. She did not, however, approach the buffet, but walked through the apartment into a neighbouring room which was empty when she and her girl companion entered it.

The princess, who was well on in the forties, was of middle height and dignified embonpoint. The too pale face, the full lips of the small mouth, the eyelids, were all artistically painted without the plebeian anxiety that desires to conceal the work of camel-hair brush and powder-puff. She carried her head, with its powdered hair under the black lace Marie Stuart cap, high, and the somewhat tired blue eyes had a certain undefined expression which appeared to look over the unimportant people present, and to seek a worthier goal of observation in the distance. She wore a plain black silk gown, the only trimming of which was of magnificent chantilly lace, of

an individual cut without reference to the fashion, ancient in form like the earrings, the diamond stars in her hair, the broad necklace of emeralds surrounded with diamonds, the green varnished walking-stick, with its gold handle set with diamonds on which she supported herself as she walked. This indubitably studied outward appearance exacted attention everywhere. The princess looked as if she had stepped out of another age and society, a portrait of some eighteenth-century ancestor which only lacked the higher mode of hairdressing and hoops to be perfectly correct.

Both her son and her hostess observed her rise, and they joined her in the room to which she had withdrawn with her young companion.

"Won't you take just a little champagne, princess?" asked Madame Abeille.

"No, I thank you," replied the princess.

"But the young people——" said Madame Abeille.

The girl blushed deeply. The young man bowed slightly. His expression was cold and unamiable, his manner stiff. He was very tall, in this assembly even something of a giant, and despite his three and twenty years, somewhat stout. His hair, cut very short, like his moustache, was light brown.

In the upper part of his face he resembled his mother, but the likeness was not very strong. The broad, heavy jawbone, and the thin, firmly closed lips showed a different origin.

"How did you like the debate, Mademoiselle Flammert?" asked her hostess.

The girl blushed again and the princess answered for her.

"The child does not speak French very fluently, and that embarrasses her."

"But she understands?" said Madame Abeille.

"Oh yes," replied the girl with animation, and with far less awkwardness than her chaperon's words implied. "I understand everything. Only with the answers——" She stopped to find the word.

"It sticks," Madame Abeille smilingly completed the

girl's sentence. Turning to the princess, she continued, "The two young authors whom you've just heard ask for the honour of an introduction, may I——"

"With pleasure," calmly replied the princess.

Madame Abeille approached the door and signed to some one in the dining-room. The young orators appeared, and Madame Abeille pronounced their names. The cornflower made a bow in perfect Court style, while his comrade, the orchid, seemed less versed in ceremonial forms of greeting.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance," began the princess, acknowledging their greeting with a slight movement of eye and head.

"Your royal highness—too kind," murmured the young men.

"Of course. I have long known you by your writings. I always read your articles in the *Vercingetorix* with the greatest interest." The words fell slowly from her full lips, each divided from its forerunner by a significant pause. She spoke with the consciousness of the importance which every one of her utterances must have for those she so distinguished. "The lecture, the debate," she continued, "was excellent, most entertaining. You speak with as much talent as you write."

"Your opinion, your royal highness, is most flattering," murmured the cornflower.

"Princess, the honour of speaking before you, gives inspiration," fawned the orchid.

In the meanwhile other people had entered the room, and begged Madame Abeille to introduce them. The two reporters, a lady wearing an order who was pointed out as a teacher of singing, a little professional pianist with her husband, a fashionable American lady shared the honour. The princess deserved admiration. She had suitable words of friendly commonplace for everybody. She was the brilliant queen of a veritable court. The girl who sat beside her took no part in the conversation, but observed the different persons with alert, sharp eyes which apparently took in every feature of the picture. She seemed to find it all most amusing. The prince, on the

contrary, who stood behind his mother, became more and more gloomy the longer the court lasted. He could not avoid being occasionally drawn into the conversation, but his remarks were brief and made with evident reluctance.

Saint-Denis, the actor, entered the room, hurried through the groups of people who yielded to his impetuosity, to the princess, seized her hand, raised it quickly to his lips, and exclaimed—

"Princess, allow me to pay you my respects. Forgive me for not having yet called on you. I have only just returned——"

"But I read weeks back in the *Vercingetorix*——" rejoined the princess.

"Three or four weeks," interrupted Saint-Denis. "When a man returns from an American tour, he finds such mountains of arrears——"

"Of course," replied the princess, "you had more important things to do than to give your old friends pleasure by going to see them. Since the prince's death, my house is less attractive."

"How can you think that, princess? Ah, my dear Prince Siegfried," he said, "how are you?" He held out his hand to the young man who took it without enthusiasm. "You were not here in time for our little play? What a pity! The audience seemed quite carried away."

"You would have been as perfect as ever, my dear Saint-Denis," said the princess.

"A man does his best. But Blanchon supported me capitally—the piece was very good," he replied.

While he spoke he smiled at himself intermittently in the mirror over the fireplace, and eyed the girl beside the princess. Her fresh beauty evidently surprised him. The dazzling red and white complexion, the oval-shaped face, the large intrepid blue eyes, the wealth of naturally waving fair hair, the finely modelled nose, standing out of the profile as if by a Florentine cinquecento engraver of coins, reminded him of a royal head that he had had the opportunity of admiring, when he was winning triumphs in Russia, and often played before the Court.

The princess, observing the direction of his glances, came up to him and said—

"I'm sorry the child did not see you play. My godchild, Mademoiselle Nicoline Flammert. She is passionately interested in the theatre. She belongs to it, I may say. Her mother is one of our best Wagner singers. My husband thought great things of her."

The low depreciatory tone in which the words were uttered brought the blood into Nicoline's cheeks, and she looked down.

The actor seemed a little surprised. He had expected to be introduced to a princess of the blood royal, or, at least, to some great aristocrat. Only theatrical blood! That gave him the right to be familiar.

"Ah, indeed, almost a little colleague. I suppose you are studying for the stage, mademoiselle?" ventured Saint-Denis.

Nicoline blushed again.

"That is my especial desire. I want to sing. But I don't know yet."

"Meanwhile, she's studying under Signora Conti," interrupted the princess. "We shall see how the voice turns out."

At that moment the Princess of Cyprus rustled into the room with a train of young people, but went out again directly she saw that the place of honour on the sofa by the fireplace was already occupied. Saint-Denis had not time even to bow.

"You know the Princess of Cyprus?" he asked.

"She sat next me in the drawing-room," replied the princess, indifferently."

Her son raised his head and frowned.

"Princess of Cyprus? What sort of a princess is that?" he asked.

The actor smiled in a conceited fashion, and was glad of the opportunity of a little gossip.

"Oh, don't you know her, my dear Prince Siegfried?" he said. "She is a very wealthy woman, of undecided nationality, Russian, Greek, or Italian. She lives in a magnificent house in the Avenue Victor Hugo, entertains

largely, chiefly foreigners. She says she is descended from the ancient kings of Cyprus and Jerusalem. Others deny that, and assert that the historical race of those kings died out long ago. But the family itself must surely know better than strangers whether it is extinct or not. The fact is, that the princess bestows decorations on her friends, which they wear in her drawing-room, and also in those which she frequents; nymph decorations, so called after her coat-of-arms and the legend of her descent. Her houses traces its origin to a nymph."

Prince Siegfried cleared his throat, but said nothing.

The princess looked at the little watch set with diamonds in her bracelet, and rose.

"Are you going already, princess?" asked the actor.

"Yes, it is the first time I have been out since my year of mourning." She stretched out her strikingly large, strong hand, every finger of which was, according to the fashion, covered with rings. "I hope, my dear Monsieur Saint-Denis," she said, "you will soon find your way again to the Rue Palestrina."

With an obeisance in real Louis XIV. style, he bent over and kissed her hand.

"Princess," he said, "I have never forgotten the way. My pleasantest memories often turn to it."

Just then Madame Abeille came up. "You're not going, my dear friend?" she said.

The princess nodded. "My little *protégée* works to-morrow with her singing mistress. Late hours are good neither for her nor her voice. I hope to see you soon."

"In a day or two, dear friend," replied Madame Abeille.

"I want to give you a story for your paper, by a young Viennese authoress whom I wish to help. Siegfried has translated it into French," said the princess.

A shadow crossed Madame Abeille's good-natured face. She quickly chased it away, and replied with a courteous if scarcely cheerful smile, "Always at your service, my dear friend, as far as it is possible."

Leaning on her green stick, the princess, accompanied by her hostess, Siegfried, and Nicoline, walked with dignity

to the door through the silent groups of people standing about the dining-room and drawing-room, who subjected them to a cross-fire of discreet or impertinent glances.

In the hall a little, round middle-aged woman jumped up from a sofa, and hurried to the princess as quickly as her corpulency permitted. While she helped her on with a handsome violet silk swan's-down lined evening cloak, the princess asked—

"Is Janusz there?"

"He did not go far away, baroness," said the maid.

Her mistress looked at her so angrily that she was silent.

In the mean time Siegfried had secured his coat, and they all went down the staircase. The carriage waited before the street-door. It was an unusually roomy closed landau, of old-fashioned build, but of splendid equipment. The cut-glass lamps, with silver mounts, bore a curved crown in the same metal. A golden curved crown was painted on the door, with its silver handle. The inside was upholstered in dark blue leather. The harness of the big, heavy, overfed horses was silver-plated. Carriage and horses reminded one of an archiepiscopal gala coach. The shaven old fat coachman on the high box-seat belonged to the picture.

A little active servant with a dark cunning face—he was a Pole—opened the door. All four entered, the maid included, who sat beside the young man opposite the princess.

The Polish footman swung himself on to the box, and the carriage rolled at a moderate speed along the Boulevards which were not very full since the theatres were not yet out.

It was a bright starlight, moonlight night, and for the season, towards the end of October, quite warm. The princess let down the window on her side. With much decision the maid closed it again, and grumbled, "Baroness will catch another cold."

"Bertha, you are impossible," said the princess.

"Oh no! If baroness is ill who has all the bother?" She spoke the purest Viennese dialect, which also betrayed

itself in her mistress's speech although she toned it down and sought to hide it by cultivating the accent of the actors of the Hofburg theatre.

The young man listened with frowning brows, and opened his window with a violent jerk. The maid turned quickly to him, but seeing him look so gloomy and cross, did not venture to say anything, and drew back into her corner with a long sigh.

For a time absolute silence reigned in the carriage, and each of the four occupants was wrapped in his own thoughts. Those of Nicoline appeared to be pleasant. At last the princess grumbled out, "You with your everlasting baroness."

"But bar——, but I spoke German, and the people don't understand," said Bertha.

Nicoline could hardly suppress a smile.

"Baroness is baroness in every language," scolded the princess.

"It is very difficult to change a habit of twenty-three years," replied Bertha. "I have grown old in baroness's service, and as long as his highness lived——"

"Don't answer me," returned the princess; and in her violence the dialect came out in all its glory. "You must break yourself of it, or else——"

"Then I must indeed break myself of it," murmured the maid, dejectedly.

The princess could not remain long angry. She was too well-fell, too good-natured, of too volatile a spirit. Her ill-humour quickly disappeared, and after a short pause she began again, "Well, Nicoline, did you enjoy yourself?"

"Oh, immensely, aunt, it was very amusing. It was so kind of you to take me." And she grasped the princess's firm hand and kissed it. "If only I spoke French fluently, and could join in the conversation and not sit dumb."

"In large assemblies, a young girl need not join in the conversation," observed the princess. "She should only see and hear. The more reserved she is, the more distinction she has."

"Oh, I don't care a bit about distinction, I want to enjoy myself," she exclaimed, proudly throwing up her fair head.

"But here you are under my protection and appear in society with me," returned the princess. "Do you understand, Nicoline? You must behave yourself."

Nicoline blushed notwithstanding the semi-darkness, and said nothing. The silence was not again broken until the carriage stopped before the princess's house.

It was situated in the "Cité Dubois," a street of private houses branching off from the Rue Palestrina into the Arc de Triomphe quarter. The "Cité" consisted of two rows of large and small houses standing in the rear of large gardens enclosed in front by iron railings.

When the Polish footman had got down, and the four occupants had left the carriage, it rolled away with suppressed clatter over the macadam of the narrow road. Coachhouse and stables were rented elsewhere. The house in the "Cité Dubois" was not provided with those appurtenances.

The incomers were greeted by the joyful deep, clear barking of a dog; the iron gate fell back into its lock and let loose a loud threatening bell. A big black Newfoundland fawned round the princess, and a silver-grey, long-haired, long-bodied Scotch terrier tried to jump on her. She stroked the creatures.

"Quiet, Nero; quiet. Bella, you mad thing!"

The garden stretched before them. The clumps of old trees still bore sufficient foliage to keep off the moonlight from the ground at their feet. Only the clear spaces were light, and a well-kept lawn and a few flower-beds could be distinguished, round which ran, its length increased by artistic skill, a winding gravel path.

As they walked up the paved way to the house, Nicoline suddenly uttered a low exclamation. In surprise the princess turned to her with, "What's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, aunt—the animal!"

Her glance fell on a china fox modelled with absolute truth to life which stood at the place where

one of the side paths turned off. In the uncertain light the statue made an impression of reality upon the uninitiated.

"You silly little goose! You've seen the things before," said the princess.

"Yes, aunt; but when one isn't thinking about them and comes upon them so suddenly——"

"It was my angel prince's hobby. He liked to have all kinds of game around, both here and in the park at Franka."

"A childish pleasure," grumbled Siegfried.

"It is not for you to criticise your deceased father," rejoined the princess, with more energy than she might have been credited with.

"There's no law against that," answered Siegfried, coldly and sulkily.

The princess had a reply on the tip of her tongue, but suppressed the words which she was on the point of pronouncing. She did not want a scene before Nicoline.

At the end of the garden stood the inconspicuous villa of two stories with five windows and the half-window of the basement kitchen. Six steps under a glass roof led sideways to the entrance, over which a bright gas-jet burned in an opal globe cut with stars.

The princess dismissed Nero at the door with a last caress, but permitted Bella to follow her into the house. She passed through the hall into the lighted dining-room where the table was laid for tea. While the maid removed and carried away her wraps and those of Nicoline, the princess, who had thrown herself into a chair, said—

"I am quite faint. What will you have, Nicoline—a cup of tea or a glass of champagne?"

"A glass of champagne, aunt, if I may?"

"And you?" said the princess, turning to Siegfried.

"Just a sandwich, mamma."

"Janusz," said the princess, "bring a bottle of champagne, and something to eat, and then you can go to bed."

The footman hastened to execute the order. As soon as they were alone, Nicoline tried to begin to talk

about Madame Abeille's party; but she stopped when she found that no one was listening to her. The princess and Siegfried were sunk in an ill-humoured silence. Without speaking, the princess swallowed the sparkling wine, and ate one or two sandwiches. At last, unable any longer to suppress what was troubling her, she uttered in sulky tones, almost more to herself than to her two companions, "Bertha will make me ridiculous with her want of tact."

"No, mamma, it's not Bertha who makes you ridiculous," replied Siegfried, emphatically.

The princess looked at him angrily. He bore it calmly. She turned her head away, paused for a moment, and then said—

"Nicoline, you had better go to bed. You have your lesson to-morrow morning."

The girl rose obediently, kissed the princess's hand, received an indifferent kiss on her brow, gave Siegfried her small hand with its long pointed fingers and opal nails which he pressed, and left the room, slowly and silently. The carpet in the hall and on the staircase deadened the sound of her light footsteps, which were only audible when she reached the landing, that shook a little under her tread.

Until then the princess remained silent. Now, when she could no longer be overheard, she asked in a choking voice, which trembled from inward excitement—

"What do you mean by the remark that I make myself ridiculous?"

The young man impolitely shrugged his shoulders, and did not reply.

"Answer me," she said, more violently. "Your mother has a right to demand an answer from you."

"Why, then, did we go to Madame Abeille's?"

"Why? Do you ask seriously?"

"Quite seriously."

"Don't be so stupid. You are no fool."

"I must be more stupid than I seem. For it's inexplicable to me why we should go to a party where we play an ambiguous and humiliating part."

"What do you mean? Have you ever seen me play such a part anywhere? Were we not properly treated at Madame Abeille's?"

"Undoubtedly. We were treated with the same distinction as your neighbour, the Princess of Cyprus. Princess Loewenstein-Franka, Princess of Cyprus—perhaps there were other princesses of similar calibre in the room. Why not? We have only to go on. Then we shall soon hold high rank in the *Tout-Paris* of shoddy folk."

The princess turned ashy pale under her mask of thick enamel.

"I forbid you to speak in that way—do you hear, Siegfried? The best society in Paris goes to Madame Abeille's, and your highness is in no way compromised."

Siegfried laughed scornfully. "My highness! You are right to jeer at me to my face, as people do doubtless behind our backs."

The princess seemed to repeat his words, and to improve matters, said—

"Such self-torment is morbid. Who should jeer at us? And for what reason?"

"But, mamma, it does not really require unusual maliciousness to laugh at people who are highnesses in the drawing-room, and once outside it are suddenly addressed by their servants as barons!"

The princess was silent for a space, then her eyes overflowed, and she began to cry quietly.

The outburst of feeling made no impression on her son. Apparently he was not sensitive. He leaned back in his chair, and stared angrily at the ceiling.

When the princess realized how little effect her tears had, she dried her eyes with a nervous movement, and said crossly—

"It is so foolish of that silly Bertha, and I have scolded her for it. That our position is not quite as good as I could wish, I know as well as you, but——"

"But, then, we must draw the right conclusions," interrupted Siegfried, violently, "and conduct ourselves in accordance with our unfortunate position."

"What," she exclaimed, louder than before, "am I

to give up the struggle? Never, never! I know what I owe my angel prince."

"Madame Abeille's drawing-room is scarcely the right battlefield."

"You know nothing of the world and life, and yet you try to teach your experienced mother. The newspapers print reports of Madame Abeille's entertainments, and to-morrow you will read in the *Vercingetorix* that her highness, the widowed princess, and Prince Siegfried of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka, were among the guests."

"Yes, with the Princess of Cyprus, who is not mentioned. The paragraph can only serve to expose us," retorted Siegfried.

"You know as well as I do, that the *Vercingetorix* is the first paper that the Grand Duke Hilarius reads at breakfast. Hardly had my angel prince closed his dear eyes when the family struck us out of the Almanach de Gotha. So the Grand Duke and all his tribe will at least see that their own newspaper recognizes me. That they can't prevent."

"They can easily prevent it if they wish. If they don't, it proves that they don't care. In this way we shall never get a step farther, and shall only have to repent our self-esteem."

"You are very ungrateful."

"Yes, I am very ungrateful."

"I desire nothing more in the world for myself. You know that well enough. It is all for your sake."

"I am much obliged, but I entreat you to leave it alone. I have made up my mind not to repeat to-day's experience, not even for the sake of a paragraph in the *Vercingetorix*, not even to annoy the Grand Duke."

The princess threw the embroidered Russian tea-serviette on the table, pressed the electric bell, and as Bertha entered, got up. Siegfried also got up, wished her good night, and made as if to kiss her hand. She drew it away from him, and with a slight bow, leaning on her maid's arm, she walked heavily out of the room.

The stairs creaked under her weight. She stood for a

long time at the top, breathing with difficulty; when she recovered her breath, she entered her brightly lighted bedroom with its salmon-coloured carpets, chairs, sofas, and bed-hangings. She was perfectly silent while Bertha helped her to undress and prepare for bed. Only the deep sighs that escaped at intervals betrayed the drift of her thoughts.

"It is more difficult to get on with Siegfried every day," she murmured more to herself than to the maid.

Bertha thought it her duty to reply. "Children grow into men and women, and then you have your troubles with them."

"Be silent, if that's all you have to say!" commanded the princess. She sank again into her own thoughts, and after a while began afresh, "I take the greatest trouble to procure him a position in society, a support, but he scarcely helps me at all. Often I almost lose courage."

Without a syllable Bertha finished her mistress's hair, put on the little lace cap, and the silk, richly embroidered night-gown, pulled off the long silk stockings, helped her into bed, arranged the pillows high up behind her back so that she rather sat than reclined, tucked the quilt in round the bed, spread the eiderdown out over its foot, fetched a medicine bottle from the mantelshelf, and poured some of its contents into a glass.

The princess took the medicine, swallowed it with a grimace, drank a little soda-water, and sighed—

"Why does one hold on so to life? It's not worth the trouble."

"Baroness is unwell and tired to-day. To-morrow she'll be in a better frame of mind."

The princess did not think of reproving the relapse into her ordinary tone.

"No," she continued, "there's nothing pleasant left for me. What more have I to expect in this world? How often I said to my angel prince, it would be terrible if I outlived him; and I was right. My angel prince always answered, 'No, no, Pepi, I forbid you to die first. I'll have no bother with your corpse.'"

"Yes, his Highness was terrified of bother all his life long," agreed Bertha.

"And we have to pay for it now," from the princess ended the discussion; she gave the maid her hand to kiss and dismissed her.

Bertha Hackl had no light place with her mistress, especially since Prince Albrecht's death. So long as he lived it was not specially hard. Every one filled his particular place, and knew exactly what he had to do. It was Bertha's duty to guess her mistress's rapid changes of humour quickly, and to meet them with understanding. She could then do whatever she liked with her. She was the princess's confidant, in both small and great troubles, her adviser in all circumstances; she was indispensable to her and did not apparently abuse the position, for she seemed submissive, and led her by an invisible silken thread. But since Prince Albrecht's demise great changes had occurred. The day on which she donned widow's weeds changed the baroness into a princess. And her character underwent signal change. She who had always been gay, became peevish and irritable. She who had talked incessantly, scarcely spoke a word. She who had been childishly frank and comfortably trusting, became suspicious and reserved. If Bertha, as in old times, chattered about parties, and gowns, and aristocratic acquaintances, the baroness irritably bade her hold her tongue. If she was silent and wrapped in her own thoughts, her mistress remarked angrily, "I don't want funeral mutes about me. Why do you gape about in that imbecile fashion? Have you forgotten how to talk?" If, as had always been the custom, she asked about the contents of letters, or the reason of visits, the baroness, flying into a passion, said, "What's it to do with you? This everlasting spying is intolerable." If Bertha was not well versed in all the details of their daily existence, she grumbled, "I don't know where your head can be. Certainly not with your work." The young master did not like her. That had always been the case, but now it was worse, for he did not trouble to conceal his dislike. Then, too, the physical side of her

work was much harder than before. The baroness had become very stout, very heavy, and suffered from her heart. She was continually needing assistance and help in various ways. She suffered from sleeplessness, and her bell summoned the sleeping maid from the neighbouring room to her bedside. All this was neither comfortable nor cheerful; melancholy brooded over the formerly cheerful house. The rich source of tips had almost run dry. The future promised no improvement, but contained undoubted threats of trouble and deterioration. Bertha was no longer the young, bright, active girl she had been when first she came to the baroness. She was very nearly fifty, and so stout that she had to be careful; she required undisturbed sleep at night, and a few hours rest in her own room in the day. She had always been a good manager, and had known how to make the best of her opportunities. She had saved up a nice little property, and the thought continually occurred to her that there was no real need for her to be worried and ill-treated. She seriously entertained the notion of leaving her mistress, and of returning to her Austrian home, there to enjoy her savings. But she had never had courage enough to make up her mind finally, and to tell the baroness of her determination. For with all the selfishness that belongs to a low order of mind, with all the unconscious hostility of servants to their masters, she had some affection for her mistress. She knew that, estranged from her son and unacknowledged by her deceased husband's family, she stood almost alone, and would feel her departure a very hard blow. And she did not like the thought of grieving the woman whose happier years she had shared, and in whom, in the enthusiasm of youth, she had been keenly interested, not only from the point of view of a trusted servant, but from that of an industrious reader of penny novelettes.

The baroness's history was sufficiently romantic and sentimental to make a deep impression on the heart and imagination of a Viennese girl of the people.

Baroness Josephine, a native of Vienna, was the daughter of lower middle-class parents. Her father,

Peter Schwandtner, rejoiced in a certain local reputation as a musical composer. He composed Church music which was somewhat dull, but was valued by connoisseurs for its clever counterpoint. He was more than an average violinist, but his great modesty prevented him from ever aspiring to the career of a concert player. He was content with a place in the chief quartette of the orchestra of the Imperial Opera, where he was also conductor of the ballet music. His musical knowledge, together with his regular life and loyal sentiments, attracted the attention of the Court, and procured him the poorly paid yet greatly coveted post of music-master to the Imperial children. He moved over the polished parquet of the Hofburg with a certainty that a man of the lower rank only possesses when he is either very clever or unusually simple-minded. He amused the high-born ladies and gentlemen with his delightful mixture of plebeian bashfulness and professional dignity. As a subordinate, he died of humility in the presence of noble persons; as a teacher, he was sure of himself even to presumption, and firm even to severity with his Imperial pupils. He was by nature a perfect courtier, for he let it be seen how deeply, almost painfully, the exalted presence impressed him, and he never seemed to get accustomed to it; yet he was withal so simple and natural that he won the sort of love bestowed on a trusty dog, and yet had never felt encouraged by this gracious condescension to desire anything for himself. In fact, he possessed just the qualities that the great like to find in the small.

Peter Schwandtner had three children, two daughters and one son. The son owed a small post as inspector on one of the Imperial estates to his father's connections, in which he gradually grew old on little work, small pay, and slow advancement. The elder of the girls, like her homely mother, was an insignificant person. But the younger, Peperl, inherited her father's musical talent, was in fact himself turned into a woman and made young again, but fresher, more brilliant, more piquant. Pepi was a prodigy. Her musical propensities and talents showed themselves ridiculously early. Before she could speak she could

warble tunes which she had heard sung. As a tiny little thing she stole to her father's piano, and tapped on the keys with her small fingers until the tones had some meaning. One day when her father was copying music in his room, he heard Weber's "Invitation à la Danse," ingenuously harmonized, in the next room, and played with certainty and animation. In surprise he hastened to the door and opened it—it was Peperl; she was seated at the old-fashioned instrument, with the greatest confidence, a smile on her parted lips, her eyes looking up in enchantment at the ceiling, so engrossed in her playing that she was only aware of her father's presence when he stood beside her, and exclaimed, "Peperl, where did you learn it?" She turned fiery red, jumped off the music-stool that was much too high for her, and tried to run away. But her father held her fast, questioned her closely, and discovered that she had gained her skill quite alone.

Henceforth, he devoted himself to the development of her natural gift. She did not cause him unmixed joy. She had no mind for theory, and could not get on at all with thorough bass. She was all for rhythm and melody, from the crown of her fair head to her dancing feet. When in the right mood she sang extempore rhymes to melodies of her own composition, which were neither particularly original nor deep, but flowed smoothly, like a cheerful, bubbling spring. With similar readiness, she improvised on the piano, and her playing, singing, and rhyming excited her so greatly that she would leave the instrument and dance round the room to her own singing until the impulse died down, and she was tired.

"A savage!" said her father, discontentedly shaking his head.

"A genius!" returned her mother, angrily. That was the opinion, too, of the few friends before whom Peperl had exhibited her powers, and they succeeded in making her father leave the child to her own artistic impulses. Apparently she would never be a solid musician in his sense of the words. And so, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders, he allowed her to compose doggerel rhymes, light rhythmical songs and dances; notwithstanding, she

attained great skill as a pianist, and took dancing lessons from the ballet-master of the opera.

Pepi was scarcely twelve years old when she made her *début* at a respectable suburban theatre. She created a new line. She sang, accompanying herself on the piano. She danced, singing her own songs the while, and the versatility of her talent, combined with her childish charm, took the easily inflammable Vienna public by storm. She awoke in the morning to find herself famous; the newspapers devoted much space to her, the drawing-rooms in which her father was esteemed grew enthusiastic about her, and an ingenious author appeared on the scene who wrote a sort of comedy especially for her, in which she could display her various talents organically instead of disconnectedly.

During the winter of her *début* her performances became the fashion at private parties and formed the great attraction of the evening. The Court heard of the prodigy. Some one had seen her at an evening party, another had seen her at the theatre. People talked about her, read about her, and very soon her father was jestingly reproached in the most aristocratic circles for concealing the star that had risen in his family. He stammered out confused replies; he was not flattered by the noise his little girl was making; he had hoped that his name might be in people's mouths for quite different reasons. His child's talent was merely superficial; happily she was young enough to develop her powers in directions more worthy of praise; in any case, he had done nothing to attract attention to such unimportant family concerns. But his excuses and asseverations were cut short by a command to bring little Pepi to Court. So, accompanied by a pale, anxious father, she made her entry into the great world. She felt shy for a moment herself when she made the ceremonious, much-studied obeisance to the aristocratic assemblage, but, encouraged by friendly glances and cheering words, she was quite at her ease by the time she sat down to the piano.

In a portrait of that period, from the flattering hand of a Court painter, which hangs in the Grand Ducal Picture Gallery at Franka, or at least did hang there in Prince

Albrecht's lifetime, she is represented as a pretty child, with a long face, full cheeks, dreamy eyes, a charming snub nose, wilful, somewhat pouting lips, her hair parted in the middle, and standing up stiffly on either side of the parting. She is dressed in the decorative fashion usual for children in the sixties—a short *barége* frock, with three flounces over a crinoline of moderate dimensions, a white shawl worn scarf-wise, the fringed ends being brought round from behind, and slung over both arms, then hanging loosely down, straight, plain calico drawers showing below the dress, and reaching to the feet with their heelless sandalled shoes. A tastelessly bound book and a pencil were placed in her hands, made by the painter far too old for her, and folded one over the other. A richly embroidered evening cloak lay on a chair in the corner, with a hat of almost the same shape as that worn by the female officers of the Salvation Army.

The Court was enchanted with the delightful child, who was modest and bold, respectful and impudent at the same time, and who played, sang, danced, and recited monologues in so entertaining a fashion. Her programme contained originally only four items, but the little artist had to go through almost the whole of her repertory, including, by the special desire of the Grand Duke, who had heard her at the theatre, the songs in Viennese slang, which her father had ruled out as too strong. She was applauded as enthusiastically as was possible in that circle. The father was overwhelmed with compliments, which he received in a comically embarrassed and sour manner. Great ladies condescended to talk to the child, a royal hand patted her blushing cheeks, she had supper at a table presided over by a lady of the highest distinction, and was dismissed with a gift of a sapphire and diamond bracelet, regarded by her ever after in the light of a fetish.

Her appearance at Court assured her reputation. An impresario offered her a tour, under most brilliant conditions for that time. His offer was accepted as soon as her mother, after a hard struggle, overcame the father's opposition. Schwandtner was the victim of his daughter's fame. His home was as good as broken up. His wife

naturally accompanied Peperl, and her father remained behind, a grass widower, for whom his sixteen-year-old elder daughter kept house.

Pepi Schwandtner travelled on tour for four years, not only in Germany, but also in neighbouring countries, where she did not appear in public, but only at Court; her introductions from Vienna procured her a hearing. Then she returned to her father's house, famous, terribly spoiled, well off, with a collection of splendid jewels, gifts of the royalties before whom she performed, but anæmic and with shaken nerves, so that the physicians prescribed absolute rest and quiet.

A curious period of her life followed. Josephine Schwandtner was tall, a little stout for her age, with pale cheeks, frightened, questioning eyes, a complaining, loose mouth, languid in her movements, lacking in energy, hesitating in her speech, of uncertain temper, more often gloomy than cheerful. Her relations with her family were scarcely comfortable. She was only confidential with her mother, the companion of her professional tour. The others had become estranged from her. Her brother was already in his little post, and only took his old place at the family dinner-table on Sundays. He regarded her as a creature from a higher sphere, to whom he scarcely dared lift his eyes, and if she spoke to him first, he could with difficulty be persuaded to reply. The elder sister kept herself at a cool, nay almost hostile distance. She had always disliked playing Cinderella to her taciturn father, while her younger sister flew about the world like a fairy with iridescent wings. Now, she envied her her jewels, her money, her fame. Her quiet manner seemed to her arrogance; her modest bearing odious affectation. She was always trying to make her feel that she thought small things of her, and considered herself as good as she was. Then Josephine withdrew to her room in tears; the parents sharply reprimanded her sister for her ill-temper, a circumstance that did not improve her opinion of the more favoured Josephine.

By degrees, however, the housemates became more reconciled to the condition of things. The father soon

became enthusiastic, and directly he noticed the change in Josephine's demeanour, he began to give her almost idolatrous reverence. She was no longer the giddy girl who had whirled about the world. She had apparently given up laughing. She avoided light songs and skipping dance music. That she should dance herself, she regarded as an offensive presumption. For hours at a stretch she sat silent, wrapt, dreaming dreams that took her far away from place and time, or she betook herself to the piano and improvised melancholy, tenderly melodious, or solemn airs, or she played strictly classical music, with a seriousness, a devoutness, which moved her father to tears, and to fold his hands as if in prayer.

She refused all proposals from theatrical managers and concert directors. She was not seen in public for a whole year. Then she appeared again, though only at a sacred concert on Good Friday, where, to the admiration of the audience, among whom she numbered countless worshippers, she played Church music and cantatas. The public had to get accustomed to the transformation of the pert singer of dialect songs, the playful dancer and lively pianist into a pious interpreter of sacred musical thought, but, like true Viennese, they quickly and willingly did so.

She was as gladly welcomed as the interpreter of serious music as she had formerly been admired for her mirth and liveliness. She filled a secure place in the artistic life of the city. As her health improved, she appeared more frequently in public, and society again invited her to its parties, not, perhaps, so eagerly as before, for edification is less liked as entertainment than unconventional gaiety. It was not long before she was again commanded to Court, and this time she made a conquest of an old, very religious princess, who in the past had not shared the general enthusiasm for little Peperl because she considered her art too frivolous and worldly.

Although her nerves gradually found their balance again, Josephine went through a long, difficult crisis of mysticism. Accompanied by her mother, she went daily to a convent church whose organist was celebrated, knelt

as if in rapture while the music lasted, and could neither be torn from her fervour by her anxious mother, nor be persuaded to a reasonable shortening of the period of her morning devotions. She took it into her head to renounce the world, and there was a long family struggle in order to divert her from her decision. She could not be prevented from procuring a dress of the order into which she intended to enter, and wearing it at home. She only gave up the folly when, at the instance of her parents, her confessor told her it was forbidden. Schwandtner found the most effective support in his struggle against his daughter's intention of entering a convent, in the old princess who had become fond of Josephine. Despite her piety, she counselled the girl not to become a nun, for, she said, she felt clearly that she had not the vocation, however praiseworthy were her sentiments and conduct. The good old princess could not forget the laughing child with her topical songs, her stiff locks, her short frock, and her long trousers.

So Josephine gave up the idea of a nunnery, but declared she would never marry, and, to her father's extreme vexation, curtly refused a promising, and later a celebrated, conductor of the opera orchestra with whom she had become acquainted in her parents' house, and who wished to marry her. Her father, greatly annoyed, asked her what she meant by such conduct, and how she intended to arrange her life. She replied with a dreamy expression, her eyes, as it were, looking inward, that she should live for her art, and not spoil it by the troubles and cares of everyday life. She was not quite sincere. Piano playing, composition, filled the foreground of her mind. But far behind, in a dimly lighted corner, there hovered mysterious, shadowy dreams—pictures which showed a Josephine with a coronet on her head, the black ribbon of a decoration over her shoulder, seated in a room, the silken hangings of which were embroidered with gold coronets and black eagles. She was improvising at a lacquered and wonderfully painted grand piano, while near her, in a low armchair, almost at her feet, sat a

handsome young prince gazing at her with admiring eyes. The prince's face sometimes showed quite clearly, and then she recognized her father's favourite pupil. But such clearness disturbed her, and by a painful effort of will, she tore herself away from the vision. She preferred him less corporeal, more dreamlike. He should remain an uncertain presentiment, and should not become an independent conception. It was the final thrill of the mystical crisis, the translation of the spiritual character of her high-reaching aspirations into a material one, with a corresponding change of the subject of consciousness, where a lordly palace, splendidly decorated as if for a court festival, took the place of heaven, and troops of angels and saints.

Three years passed in these inward developments and experiences. Josephine, now nineteen years old, was fully restored to health, and was moreover in the full charm of her youth.

Then an event happened which decided her fate in life.

At the time of the Confederation of the Rhine, Prince Ditmar, brother of the reigning Grand Duke of Loewenstein and Franka, in anger at his brother's friendly policy towards France, left home, and entered the Austrian service. He rose high in the favour of the Emperor Francis, who showed him as much attention as he could without offending the Emperor Napoleon. He gave him an Uhlan regiment, in the command of which he won distinction during the war of Liberation. After Waterloo and the second entry of the allies into Paris, the twenty-nine-year-old colonel was promoted major-general. He was reconciled to his brother, and received the title of royal highness, which was recognized by the Emperor of Austria and the German Confederation. He remained in Austria and quickly rose to be a cavalry general. He was one of the most conspicuous and brilliant figures at Court, and the hero of many highly coloured stories of daring adventures in love and war. But his happiness was clouded by pecuniary difficulties. He possessed nothing besides his pay as a general on active service, and the

income due to him from the family, but, since his reconciliation with his reigning brother, that was measured according to the requirements of a petty German Court, and not to those of a splendid Imperial Court. He was in everlasting need of money, and was helped at almost regular intervals by his commander-in-chief. But the amounts at length became too much for the parsimonious emperor, and he informed his favourite that he must either cut down his expenses or marry an heiress. "Rather cut down expenses," exclaimed Prince Ditmar, bringing his spurs together with a click, and he went away and borrowed a larger sum than usual. But his master meant it seriously, and this time left him in the lurch. His creditors pressed the pleasure-loving prince so sorely that he was compelled to ask for a provincial command in order to avoid dismissal, and a return to Franka as a fugitive. He was now ready for his benevolent patron's schemes. His magical good luck stood him even here in good stead. An heiress fabulously rich for that period was awaiting a husband. She was the Polish Princess Level, whose property lay in three states, and was bigger than the whole of the Grand Duchy of Meissen-Loewenstein. There were difficulties to be overcome besides Prince Ditmar's objection to matrimony. The prince was forty years old; the little Level, as she was called at Court, barely twenty. The alliance was not one of equal birth; for the father of the great heiress had been created a prince by the emperor, and although, after his elevation, complacent genealogists had invented a family tree for him, which reached far back, and showed him doubly related to Jagello and Sech, it was known perfectly well that the nobility of the family was of recent creation, and that its enormous wealth came partly from the successful manipulation of the affairs of a Polish noble family, who were ruined while their steward grew rich, and partly by the skilful acquirement of confiscated or ruined estates after wars or revolutions. The demand that his only child should conclude a morganatic marriage with the foreign Prince so angered old Level that for a long time he would not listen to the proposals. He

demanded a properly recognized and equal marriage by which his daughter would become a member of the Grand Ducal house, and a royal highness, and that the children of the marriage should stand in the line of succession to the throne. That necessitated a modification of the laws of the house of Loewenstein and Franka, and the recognition of new statutes by the Federal Council. It required the whole power of the emperor to carry this through at a time when questions of the position of the reigning families were regarded as the most important of all diplomatic and political affairs. The difference in religion was a hard nut to crack. Prince Ditmar was not only a Protestant, but also the scion of a princely house that had first accepted the reformed belief, nay, had almost itself invented Protestantism, at least politically, while the Princess Level, as a Pole, was naturally a Catholic. Prince Ditmar must abjure his belief, a concession not easily to be gained from him and his brother, but more easily, perhaps, than the recognition of the equality of the marriage. At length the alliance was accomplished, but the Emperor Francis used to say afterwards that the gaining of Lombardy, Venetia, and Galicia, had been an easier task than the marriage of Prince Ditmar with the little Level.

The history of the marriage need not be related here. There were five children of it, of whom Prince Albrecht was the third, a brother and sister coming before.

Even as a child, Prince Albrecht showed himself singularly lacking in talent of any kind. But he had a gentle, amiable disposition, which made him more like a girl than a boy. He reduced his teachers to despair, but they could not be angry with him—he was too good-tempered, defenceless and insinuating. His father would have liked to be more severe, but his mother would not permit it; and when Prince Ditmar died, in his sixty-second year—the members of the house of Loewenstein-Franka were not, as a rule, long-lived—no one troubled about the little nine-year-old prince. He grew up, so to speak, in the folds of his mother's skirts; he clung to her with almost morbid love, and she bestowed on him

all the affection of which her somewhat chilly heart was capable.

Princess Hedwig, his sister and his junior by four years, the spoilt pet of the family, divided his affections with his mother. She was Prince Albrecht's idol. As a little boy of five he could have no greater pleasure than to be allowed to hold his little sister in his arms, and carry her about. His parents and brothers and sisters therefore mockingly called him "nurse." Later, he would not stir from her side, and was always miserable if he could not be with her. The only hostile feeling that could be attributed to him at that period was violent jealousy of his youngest brother, with whom Princess Hedwig preferred to play because he was two years nearer her in age and more lively and cheerful than the slow and somewhat capricious Prince Albrecht. The impressions of childhood were never effaced, and the mutual relations of the brothers remained cold and formal till the end of their life.

Whatever knowledge Prince Albrecht acquired he learned in the company of Princess Hedwig, at whose lessons his mother allowed him to be present. He was tolerably proficient in French, but all other subjects remained hazy to him for the whole of his life. He was a good rider and an excellent shot, a zealous and persistent adherent of the chase, an untiring playgoer, a passionate lover of music who tried successively to master piano, violin, and flute, but never succeeded in achieving even the skill of a *dilettante* on either instrument. On the other hand, thanks to Schwandtner's teaching, Princess Hedwig became a pianist and musician of considerable proficiency, and Prince Albrecht could never be induced to leave the music-room on any pretext whatever when his sister was at the piano.

Prince Albrecht was destined for the military career for which his elder brother did not show the least taste. It was greatly deplored in high places that the name of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka should not be represented in the Imperial army, and a wish was expressed that the second son should adopt the vocation. Prince Albrecht likewise had little desire for it; but refusal was out of

the question, and on his sixteenth birthday he was appointed to a lieutenancy in a fashionable dragoon regiment. His uniform, and especially the helmet with its projecting crest, amused the twelve-year-old Princess Hedwig, and she told her brother she would gladly drive and ride with him in the Prater; and so, in the beginning, he found pleasure in his new calling. But it did not last long. The punctuality demanded in his work and a certain amount of inevitable exertion were distasteful to him, and he told his mother plainly that he had had enough of the military game. There were storms in the palace of Loewenstein-Franka. When the princess realized that nothing could overcome her son's decision, she succeeded in obtaining that no demands of any sort should be made of him, and that he should be appointed to the suite. Sharp tongues at Court made some scarcely courteous remarks about the extraordinary influence that the Level blood exercised on the Loewensteins.

At the outbreak of the war with Italy he was by favour promoted first lieutenant, assigned a post in the military suite, and was permitted to accompany it to the seat of war. The twenty-one-year-old young man behaved like a child who was going to school for the first time. He would not leave Vienna, threatened to do all sorts of absurd things, was deaf to his mother's commands, although he generally yielded her obedience. "Are you a coward?" the princess was forced to exclaim when all reasonable argument had been exhausted. Instead of an answer, as quick as lightning, he thrust a Malay dagger that was lying on the drawing-room table deep into his arm. "You can see for yourself whether I am a coward, mamma." After this mad trick, which happily entailed no bad result, he was brought to confess that he did not wish to go to Italy because he could not bear to be separated from Princess Hedwig. Then the little princess took the matter in hand, and succeeded where her mother had failed. She persuaded her brother to fulfil the light duty laid on him.

He was only absent a few weeks. He returned a captain of horse, with a war medal, but found that

the old conditions no longer prevailed. His exaggerated devotion to his young sister gave his mother cause for thought, and she so arranged that the two should not continue their hitherto free intercourse, but should only be together at meal-times and during the princess's music lessons. He suffered under this privation, but was compelled to submit, for his mother made it clear to him that Hedwig was now a grown-up young lady, and no longer the play-fellow of her big brother. In the following year he had again occasion to feel and to declare that he could not live away from the presence of his beloved sister. The government of the kingdom of Atlantis sought a princely consort for the queen. Around this Atlantidian marriage were woven a thousand intrigues, the threads of which reached to all the great courts. The destinies of the house of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka had experienced an extraordinary elevation in the last generation. Its scions sat upon the new throne of Hageland, and on the first step of the ancient and famous throne of Gotheim, and the Gotheim Prince Consort drew the attention of the Queen of Atlantis and her counsellors to the Vienna cousin. The old princess joyfully received the confidential overtures, and when she had come to an understanding with the special envoy who was entrusted with the affair, she informed her son that it was in his power to place a kingly crown on his head. She lost all self-control when Prince Albrecht stubbornly replied, "I don't want it." In her anger she said that if she had not nursed him herself she should think he was a changeling, and not a child of hers and of his father. His mother's hard words made him weep, but did not overcome his obstinacy; he would not marry to live so far away, not even for the sake of a king's crown. The princess and the Loewenstein-Franka family were determined not to let the crown escape them, and when they saw that, unluckily, nothing was to be done with Prince Albrecht, they put forward his younger brother, although he was only twenty years old. He was not so handsome as his tall brother by a long way, whose good-tempered and classically regular face was not brightened by an intellectual expression,

but after a little opposition at Atlantis he was accepted, and the wedding took place. The princess was proud to think that under the dynasty of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level—she had insisted on the inclusion of the last name in the title—a new epoch began in the history of the kingdom of Atlantis.

On his father's death, the eldest prince became the ducal head of the Austrian line of the family as heir of the entail established by Prince Ditmar's marriage, and with his income of ten million gulden, was a desirable match. When his younger brother became titulary king, the last reservation that had existed against him in the inner circle of the Court on account of his maternal origin vanished. He married an archduchess who stood very near the throne, despite his thirty-three years, his unattractive appearance, and his somewhat riotous past. By this new alliance the princess attained almost the highest position at Court, and as she had years before married her elder daughter to a Bourbon, she reckoned with certainty on an archduchess for Prince Albrecht, and an archduke for Princess Hedwig.

Princess Hedwig made no difficulties. When she had completed her twentieth year, the Archduke August Ferdinand of Umbria demanded her hand. He was accepted after a little delay, caused by the fact that shortly before the Umbrian line had lost their throne, and therefore occupied an ambiguous position at Vienna. At the same time, negociations were begun on Prince Albrecht's account, for whom an archduchess belonging to a distant branch was destined The alliance depended on the old princess's willingness to establish an entail out of her own property in favour of the second son, so as to make him independent of his brother's bounty who, in spite of his enormous wealth, was not distinguished for liberality.

The affair was well advanced when fate changed everything with terrible suddenness. The beautiful, excitable, and imprudent young princess took cold at the betrothal party, celebrated with great pomp at the Loewenstein Palace on a chilly evening in late autumn. To the general consternation, she was obliged to retire before the end of

the evening, on account of a violent fit of shivering. The physicians pronounced it a bad case of double pneumonia; four days later, the princess was dead.

The effect of this terrible blow on Prince Albrecht was such that torturing anxiety about her son drove the mother's grief for the loss of her daughter into the background. He behaved like a madman. During his sister's illness he had only been allowed to see her once, for a few minutes on the first day. Then the physicians forbade him to enter the sick-room, because the invalid had to be kept from all excitement. But he could not be prevented from putting up a camp bedstead in the anteroom of his sister's apartments, and from lying in wait night and day before the door through which the doctors, the nurses, and her mother went in and out. They tried to calm him, but when, on the fourth day, he saw the Court chaplain appear with the viaticum, the truth became clear to him, and he determined to enter the sick-room by force. It took the most strenuous exertions on the part of all the servants to convey the frenzied young man, who was as strong as a lion, into a distant wing of the palace. Other outbreaks followed the first. After a family council, the princess declared that she could not take it on herself to conceal his sister's death from her son. She went to him, but did not need to utter a word. Her tearful countenance, the absence of all jewelry, even of her earrings, which always seemed part of her, told the news plainly enough. Prince Albrecht fainted when he saw her. When he came to, he asked with such violence to see the departed that the terribly anxious mother did not dare to refuse. He threw himself on the beloved corpse with the roar of a wounded lion, took it in his arms, covered it with kisses, rained streams of tears on it, and was only separated from it by force.

He uttered violent threats against the doctors, and swore he would murder them as they had murdered his darling. He was dragged to his room, and closely watched. He ill-treated the servants who tried to prevent his outbursts of fury, and shrieked that he would not allow the Princess Hedwig to be buried. After a couple of days

the usual reaction set in. The prince refused food, and in the moments of excitement that now and again broke his languid misery, he could be prevented with difficulty from running his head against the wall or jumping out of the window. His brothers and sisters asked that he should be placed in an asylum, but his mother could not make up her mind to such harsh measures, and he remained under the care of his family.

By degrees, his despair sank into a uniform melancholy, which seemed to take eternal possession of his spirit. He lost touch with the outside world, lay the whole day on the sofa, his eyes closed, his face turned to the wall, repeatedly sighing, sometimes crying quietly. He had to be forced to go to meals. He did not answer when spoken to; even if they shook him, he resisted but weakly, and the longer this condition lasted, the more seriously the physicians shook their heads. They prescribed that he should walk about the palace, in order to force his limbs into activity, and to break the monotony of his voluntary imprisonment. During these promenades he came upon the little music-room on the first-floor, where Princess Hedwig's piano stood. Then he awoke, as if from a trance, look and manner became alive, and he asked quietly and gently to be left there for a little while. He sat down on the low chair near the piano, as he had been accustomed to do while his sister played, and looked steadfastly at her empty place. He remained so for a long time. Then he stood up, went to the piano, opened it with a clatter, passed his hand caressingly over the keys, and more willingly than usual accompanied his attendants back to his room. The next day, he went to the music-room of his own accord and behaved in the same way. His attendants told the physicians of the prince's conduct, and thereupon one of them had an idea; he urged the princess to try a music-cure, to have the favourite pieces of his dead sister played to the prince by some young and pretty pianist. The idea was somewhat daring, for it might renew his grief, but it was more likely that it would work favourably.

At the doctor's suggestion, the princess applied to a

leading light of the Vienna High School. The choice of the artist was soon made. It could, as a matter of course, be no other than Josephine Schwandtner, who was a *persona grata* at Court, who had often played at the Loewenstein Palace, and whose father had been poor Princess Hedwig's music-master.

A servant was immediately sent to bring Schwandtner to the palace. At sight of him, the princess burst into tears, described to him in a few words the condition of Prince Albrecht's mind, and informed him what service she hoped his daughter might render. Schwandtner was moved to his inmost heart. He had been much attached to his pupil, who had become poetically transfigured through her early death, and it was a testimony of faith to her memory to be able to assist in healing her brother's deeply wounded heart.

Josephine, too, regarded the task with emotion and pride. Her lively imagination made her dream a noble, ideal part in the affair for herself. She was music embodied, and would be a consoling angel to a suffering heart. She was to bring the lonely, loving brother a harmonious message from heaven. The voice of the dead herself should speak to him out of her playing, and change his grief into hope and trust. In that fanciful mood, accompanied by her father, she went to the Loewenstein Palace. A ducal carriage had been sent to fetch her. It was a gloomy January day, and snow was falling fast. Old Schwandtner wished her to dress in black, but Josephine put on a white gown. She felt that she must not remind the prince of death, but of transfiguration. The princess, herself in her deep mourning garments, started when she saw the pretty girl in her light toilette. With womanly penetration she imagined the artist's reason and made no remark. She thanked her for her willingness to do a service of love with her art, implored her to have patience with Prince Albrecht, if he—she could not at once hit on the word—was unfriendly, graciously dismissed Schwandtner, whose presence was not necessary, and took Josephine to the little music-room.

The girl's heart beat high when she sat down to the

piano. The princess seated herself in an armchair near one of the windows. Soon the door opened, and Prince Albrecht entered. His nurse and his two attendants remained in the anteroom. At the same moment Josephine began to play the Allegro maestuoso of Chopin's Sonata, op. 58, a piece that the princess had played beautifully, and a favourite of Prince Albrecht. The prince stood by the door as if rooted to the ground, turned deathly pale, stared with wide-opened eyes at the corner where the piano was, and moved his hands gropingly in the air as if in search of support. The tears rose in Josephine's eyes, her whole body trembled, and she was scarcely mistress of her technique; but she played bravely on, and gave the tender persuasive melody with a fervour which would have gone straight to the heart of a calm and healthy listener. Prince Albrecht looked round in confusion, descried his mother at the window, crept up to her on tip-toe, put both arms round her neck, and stammered softly into her ear—

"Oh, mamma, mamma!"

The princess sought to calm him by gentle caresses, and Josephine stopped. He turned round quickly and whispered—

"Go on, go on!"

His mother pointed to the chair by her own; Prince Albrecht sank into it, leaned back and closed his eyes. When the piece was finished he sat up straight, and called out loudly—

"Again, again!"

Then Josephine, who had regained her composure, played the whole sonata through, and then, with a questioning glance at the princess, looked up from the piano.

She nodded. "That is enough for to-day, my dear; many, many thanks."

The prince stood up, and, approaching the deeply blushing girl, said, with emotion—

"Best thanks, my dear young lady; you have done me good. Will you come again?"

"Certainly," replied the princess, quickly, for Josephine. "Fräulein Schwandtner will come as often as you like."

Prince Albrecht bowed to the artist, who had risen from her chair, grasped her hand, and pressed a long kiss on it.

The physicians, the princess, and Josephine, were all equally satisfied with their work. The idea proved right. The artist, fetched and taken home in the ducal carriages, came to the palace every day, at first accompanied, later alone; she played for a longer time, at last for an hour and a half, Prince Albrecht's favourite pieces of Chopin, Mendelssohn and Schumann. The princess was fairly musical, but scarcely appreciated a large daily amount of piano-playing. At first she was present during the music, and rejoiced deeply at the change that was being wrought in her son. After a week, however, she made her appearance less regularly. If she was otherwise occupied, she did not disturb herself when told of Fräulein Schwandtner's arrival; she contented herself with looking into the music-room for a moment, and responding amiably to the girl's respectful greeting. She had no scruples in leaving her alone with Prince Albrecht. For she looked on the whole matter as a remedy, and regarded little Pepi Schwandtner as a medicine or a tool.

But little Pepi Schwandtner was a remedy possessing feeling and imagination. Prince Albrecht revived, regained colour and animation, and once again felt a pleasure in existence. Josephine, on the contrary, became pale and absent; she was sunk in far-away dreams, and only awoke when the hour struck for the drive to the palace. The princess saw Prince Albrecht become himself again with the keenest satisfaction; Schwandtner saw Pepi fall back into her old illness with increasing anxiety. The princess did not observe when she entered the music-room that her son, no longer wrapt in himself, occupied a stool near the player, and eagerly and attentively turned over the pages. The Schwandtners found it natural that Pepi should talk a great deal about the prince whom she saw every day, about his handsome person, his good temper, his engaging simplicity, his love of music. This lasted for six weeks. Then the doctors declared that the concerts

had done everything that was expected of them, and that Prince Albrecht might be regarded as cured. The princess informed her son that Josephine Schwandtner would discontinue her visits.

He looked surprised, frowned, and asked, "Why?"

"Well, she can't come here for ever," rejoined the princess.

"Why not?" he returned, in such evident annoyance that the princess's attention was aroused; she looked at him searchingly, and when he looked down in confusion, like a boy convicted of some naughty act, she observed—

"You're a child," and ended the conversation.

Josephine came to the palace no more, but Prince Albrecht, who had been going out again for a fortnight, found his way to the Schwandtners. His first appearance in the humble middle-class dwelling had the effect of a thunderbolt. Frau Schwandtner shrieked when the maid introduced the tall young officer into the room, and instead of greeting the prince, whom she recognized at once, she ran to her daughter's room, and breathlessly stammered out—

"Pepi, the prince is here, and see what a sight I look! I shall die of shame."

Josephine at once understood what had happened, and although she was only wearing her ordinary house-frock, she went into the drawing-room without delay, and left her mother to array herself in her best.

When she appeared at the door, Prince Albrecht hastened towards her with open arms, and before she realized it, they were round her, and she was exchanging passionate kisses with him. All the restraint which the music-room in the palace had exercised through association and habit was here, in other surroundings, removed as if by the enchantment of a kindly fairy, and the two fell into each other's arms as if they had belonged to each other from time immemorial.

But when, after about a quarter of an hour, Frau Schwandtner appeared in a stiff silk gown, with a heavy gold chain round her neck, and three bracelets on her

wrists, she found two well-behaved young people seated at a respectful distance from each other, one of whom got up and greeted her pleasantly. She did not observe their flushed faces, their shining eyes, their quick breathing, because she was too much occupied with the curtsey which she made the prince in true Court style. It was all very awkward, for although on her tours with Josephine, Frau Schwandtner had come into brief touch with highnesses and even royalties, she was not accustomed, like her husband, to close intercourse with them, and the presence of Prince Albrecht in her modest home entirely upset her. She could not raise her eyes or find anything to say; the prince on his side was no genius at conversation, and on this occasion had special reason to prefer silence. Thus it fell to Josephine to bear the burden of the talk, but even she could not prevent long pauses between the brief remarks, and after a little while Prince Albrecht himself awoke to the situation. He got up, kissed Josephine's hand, pressed that of her mother, sent his remembrances to her father, asked permission to come again, and told Frau Schwandtner she was on no account to allow his visits to put her out.

When Schwandtner came home, mother and daughter told him of their visitor; he frowned and stared at them. At first he muttered something incomprehensible, and then said clearly—

"What has the prince to do here?"

Josephine turned crimson, and said nothing. Her mother answered for her—

"He wished to thank for the concerts."

"Quite unnecessary," grumbled the old man. "He could have done that at the palace. I do not like such visits."

"We often received visits of the kind on our tours," said Josephine, modestly.

"Then you were a child, and now you are a marriageable young lady," replied her father, harshly.

"We can't forbid the prince the house," whined Frau Schwandtner.

"I'll receive him the next time he comes," remarked

her husband, and closed the conversation. But he remained very much out of humour.

He did as he had said. When Prince Albrecht came the next day, in the afternoon, he found, not altogether to his joy, Schwandtner in the drawing-room, who, with well-feigned surprise, greeted him, and asked—

"Your highness, what procures me the honour?"

The prince was embarrassed, and began to stutter out in confusion—

"I thought you knew, sir, that I—that I—was here yesterday——"

"Indeed!" drawled the old man, and looked at him searchingly.

The prince avoided his glance, and continued, "I have got so used to seeing Fräulein Pepi every day; her society did me so much good in my grief. I am so grateful to her. I don't want to break off the intercourse so entirely——"

Schwandtner interrupted him with, "Does the princess, your mother, know of these visits?"

Prince Albrecht lifted his head and turned very red. He scarcely knew whether to be angry or to treat the thing as a joke. After a short struggle he decided on the latter, and replied, with a forced smile and pretended good-humour—

"But, my dear Schwandtner, don't behave like this; a major in the Imperial army is no schoolboy to ask his mother's permission to go out."

"I beg your pardon, your highness, it was not so intended. I mean that, if a Prince Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level visits middle-class folk like us, there will be gossip."

"What do you mean by middle-class folk? Art raises everybody to the level of the nobility," replied the prince.

"I am convinced of that," said Schwandtner; "but everybody does not recognize that nobility, and there are evil tongues enough in the world."

"What does that matter?" said the prince.

"It matters nothing to you, your highness," returned Schwandtner, "but to my daughter!"

Prince Albrecht, who had meanwhile taken a seat, looked down, and was silent for a while. Then he said—

"It will not hurt Pepi. Have confidence in me."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the father.

"I am in love with the girl," answered the prince.

"A nobleman's caprice," returned Schwandtner.

"I'm not that sort of person, you must know," said the prince.

"Your highness, you must forgive a father. My girl can only love a man who wishes to and can marry her. And that your highness can't do," said Schwandtner.

"Why not?" asked the prince, simply, and this time looked the old man full in the face.

"Are you serious, your highness?" said Schwandtner.

The prince nodded. Then the old musician seized the prince's hand, and in spite of his objections, covered it with kisses and broke out into loud sobbing, that brought the women, who had long been listening outside the door, into the room. The prince took no heed of her parents, but hastened to Josephine, and the two embraced and kissed each other passionately, while the old man dried his eyes, and his wife clasped her hands in confusion.

Schwandtner felt that he had fulfilled his paternal duty like a hero. He took his wife by the hand and led her into the next room, leaving the lovers alone. There, speaking below his breath, he told her quickly what had taken place. She was so confused that she began to pray. He also found it necessary to pull himself together. When he had regained his composure, he said, "Come in; it's not right to leave them alone." But she refused, whispering that she could not trust herself. He had actually to drag her into the drawing-room again. The prince and Josephine looked very happy. He had asked her if she would marry him, and she had at once consented, without hesitation, without pretending surprise and embarrassment, without humble words concerning her unworthiness

and the like. She simply saw a dream realized, in which she had long trusted. The prince fitted into a picture that had been before her inward eyes for years, and in which only one detail had been shadowy: the form of the noble suitor.

"Then we are to celebrate a betrothal?" asked the musician, with trembling voice.

The word struck the prince unpleasantly. "Let us keep the matter to ourselves for a little," he said, more quickly than was his custom. "Don't you agree, Pepi?"

"I agree to everything," joyfully exclaimed the girl, and there followed more kissing, so that the two old people turned away their eyes in confusion.

When the prince left the Schwandtners' house, despite his indubitable lover's excitement, he was not very happy in his mind. He had not thought of marriage, when an impulse, about which he did not think very deeply, led him to Josephine. It appeared to him now that he had been taken unawares. Something like hatred stirred within him against old Schwandtner, who had presumed too much. But he was not accustomed to worry himself seriously for long about anything, and he came to the conclusion that required the least trouble, that is, to let things go as they would, and to say nothing to his mother, because it would not be becoming in these early days of mourning. He did not apply that convention to himself.

He went to see Josephine regularly every afternoon, and spent hours with her; sometimes her meek, silent mother would sit in a corner; more often they were alone, and would talk, or he would listen to her playing; in fine weather he invited her to drive with him. After a week he was so much at home in the little house, that he invited himself to supper. This put good Frau Schwandtner into a great pother. She was not accustomed to Royal guests, and the gentle, meek woman lacked the pride that would have led her to give the prince a simple meal, simply served. Without a thought of the expense, she procured a smart meal from a high-class restaurant, served with silver, china, and glass. The prince wondered how a little music-master could afford to eat oysters, chicken

consommé, trout, venison, truffled capon, asparagus (in March), *pâté de foie gras*, fruit, ices, Roquefort cheese, and to drink champagne. When Frau Schwandtner apologized for the modest meal, he was simple enough to reply, "But, I assure you, my dear madam, I don't get anything better at home."

Josephine's elder sister was almost ill with envy, and gave vent to her irritation in bitter, hateful speeches, which threw doubt on the prince's intentions. She refused to join the supper-table, saying she was not good enough to sit down with a prince. The parents found that she was, in the main, right. The guest was not congenial to them, and the next time he stopped to supper, they laid the table only for him and Josephine, and left them together in a cosy *tête-à-tête*. The prince regarded this as tender consideration, and accepted it without remark. They had to reckon with his presence as part of their regular daily life and to arrange things accordingly. Schwandtner dipped deeply into his daughter's property, bought new drawing-room and dining-room furniture, and table silver, and gave a standing order to Sacher, the best restaurant in the town, to send in a choice supper every day. The prince took no heed, and let it all go on. This nonchalant life lasted for some weeks, and became more enjoyable with the advent of May, when instead of confidential talks in the Schwandtner house, excursions could be made in the delightful environs of Vienna. The prince had got over his grief; his dead sister seemed almost forgotten, he was happy and always ready to trifle and joke. But Josephine became quieter and paler, her mother often found her in tears, and wept with her without exchanging a word. One day, when the prince arrived at his accustomed hour to spend a pleasant afternoon and evening, Josephine told him a piece of news that ruffled his temper. As he said nothing, Josephine, summoning all her courage, asked, "When shall we get married?" He stammered something about preparations, about difficulties, about the year of mourning of which only five months had passed, and ended by saying that he could fix no certain time.

"Does your mother know?" asked the anxious girl, in fear.

"No," he replied quietly.

Then she burst out sobbing in despair, and would not allow herself to be consoled by the embarrassed and ill-humoured prince. "You don't love me, you are playing with me. I shall not survive it," she repeated again and again, when he tried to calm her with meaningless words. He found the situation uncomfortable, and as he did not like that sort of thing, he simply took his departure.

He went, and did not return. When he did not appear the next day at his usual time, Frau Schwandtner asked in surprise, "Is the prince ill?"

"It would seem so," replied Josephine; and she quickly sought her room, in order to cry her fill.

The second and third day passed, and no prince appeared. Then Josephine could bear it no longer, and wrote him a note, simply containing the words, "My angel prince, will you forsake me, after making me unhappy? Your inconsolable Pepi."

She waited for an answer for two days, shut up alone in her room, dissolved in tears, neither eating nor sleeping, but none came. Then the misery became too great for her to bear alone; she threw herself into her mother's arms, who plied her with questions, and hiding her blushing face on her mother's breast, sobbed out her bitter grief over the deceitful love, and her deadly fears for the future. The mother never thought of keeping the girl's dreadful secret to herself for one moment, but told her husband directly he came home.

Then Schwandtner became a hero. He, who only displayed courage in the defence of good musical principles against contemptuous ignorance and the idleness of his pupils, but who extinguished himself in true humility before the higher beings whom God himself had given as masters to common mortals, did not delay or hesitate for a second; he clapped his hat violently on his head and ran out of the house, without bidding any one good-bye. A cab took him to the Loewenstein Palace

with all the celerity for which the Viennese drivers are famed. Suppressing all outward signs of agitation, he asked for Prince Albrecht. He was at home. The footman, who knew Schwandtner, admitted him without further question, and did not find it remarkable that he followed closely behind him. The prince was visible to the servant and the visitor at the same moment. He turned very red, but pulled himself together. The conversation was short and pregnant.

"Your highness," said Schwandtner, "you promised to marry my daughter. Are you ready, as man and prince, to keep your word?"

The prince muttered something about surprise, about forgetfulness to whom he was speaking; but Schwandtner held him fast to the point.

"It is we who are surprised; it is Josephine. I do not forget that I am speaking to a great noble, who persisted in entering a respectable middle-class house, in asseverating his honourable intentions, and was only received on that understanding. There is no time to lose. By my right as a father, I demand an immediate answer. Is your highness prepared to act as a man of honour or not? If not, then I know what I have to do."

The vagueness of the threat naturally made a strong impression on a man of the prince's character, and he answered quietly that he must first have his mother's consent.

"We'll ask it at once," said Schwandtner, firmly, signed to him with a commanding gesture of the hand to get up off the sofa, pointed with outstretched finger to the door, and led the almost hypnotized prince as if by the ear through corridors and by staircases to the princess's apartments.

The second interview was less triumphant than the first. The princess was greatly astonished. When the prince, in spite of Schwandtner's repeated demands, refused to open his mouth, Schwandtner was himself compelled to explain matters. The princess was so enraged that at first she found nothing to say. As soon as she could speak, she exclaimed—

"Albrecht, you have been entrapped. You were stupid

enough to be caught. Go to your room. Go! But it is incomprehensible to me that you should think of marriage for one moment. You are a sensible man. Josephine has behaved unpardonably; it serves her right. But I like the girl, and don't wish her to come to harm. We shall deal with her as it becomes the Dukes of Loewenstein. Now go home and tell your daughter."

Prince Albrecht actually obeyed, and sheepishly left the room without uttering a word. But Schwandtner, his whole body quivering with an excitement which he could scarcely suppress, replied—

"I do not know how your highness can insult us so cruelly. I am not here to ask for money. My daughter has means of her own; she has her parents. She wants no money, but her honour."

"She should have taken care of herself," snapped the princess; and she stood up.

"So she did," returned Schwandtner; "the prince was received in our house on a promise of marriage."

"You're mad!" shouted the princess, quite beside herself. "Go away!"

"Your highness——"

"Go away, or I shall call the servants."

There remained nothing to do but to go. But the unhappy father had not finished his day's work. He hurried off to the old pious princess, who had always been his daughter's patroness, found her at home, was admitted, and in stammering words, yet without any reserve, made his confession, and implored her to say a word for his child with the Princess Loewenstein, the more that Prince Albrecht made no difficulty about fulfilling his duty. The old lady listened, with closed eyes and folded hands, was silent for a time after Schwandtner had finished, and then slowly let fall the words—

"Your daughter has sinned. She must atone. That is the rule God has set before us all."

"It will be her death, your imperial highness!" replied the father, and burst out sobbing.

"I hope she will live, in order to repent," said the princess.

The musician fell prostrate at her feet and clasped his hands.

"Your imperial highness, be merciful."

She bade him get up, and said in her gentlest voice—

"I can do nothing for you. Josephine has committed a fault. She must take the consequences. She should have taken better care of herself. You see, this is what comes of sending children into the contaminated atmosphere of the theatre, and letting them dance, and sing frivolous songs on the public stage."

When Schwandtner, with gloomy countenance and firmly shut lips, reached home, his wife tried to question him. He growled—

"Let me alone."

But he took the steps necessary to gain an audience in the highest quarters, and there he met with a favourable reception. He obtained a promise that both sides should be heard, and some decision arrived at.

The affair was soon known at Court, and aroused passionate sympathy. Old Schwandtner and Peperl had many patrons, Prince Albrecht had no friends. The prince declared his readiness to keep his word. His mother violently objected, and her sons, especially the King of Atlantis, supported her. Her son-in-law of the House of Bourbon was also strong in opposition. The reigning Grand Duke, on the other hand, and the Hageland and Gotheim lords and ladies, learning the truth from the highest quarters, were in favour of a chivalrous settlement. The princess could not long keep up her opposition. She saw herself threatened with the Emperor's displeasure, and notwithstanding her family connections, her position was not firm and certain enough to risk banishment from Court. She gave her consent, but under the least amiable conditions. The marriage must naturally be a morganatic one. The young couple must not live in Vienna, because intercourse with the middle-class relations must be prevented. The prince must be satisfied with an allowance which would not admit of his living in Vienna in accordance with his rank.

The negociations with the Courts of Franka, Hageland, and Gotheim were carried on by Schwandtner himself, who was accompanied by a privy councillor, and introduced by letters in the Emperor's own hand. They were pushed on with the greatest zeal and energy. But they took several weeks, and the mother and daughter, who had naturally remained in Vienna, had ample time to be worried to death by the tortures of suspense. At last Schwandtner returned, bringing with him the settlement. He had the consent of all necessary, and a patent of nobility from the Grand Duke, who conferred the title and rank of Baroness von Gronendal on his future cousin. The marriage could take place at once, but the command went forth that it should be celebrated as quietly as was consistent with the law. The ceremony was performed one day in August, in a suburban chapel. All the Schwandtner family were present, all the Loewenstein family absent. The Grand Duke and the musician's noble patrons sent representatives. Josephine could wear a wedding-gown without public scandal. But it was high time.

Directly after the wedding the young couple left Vienna. The Baroness von Gronendal was not received by her mother-in-law in a farewell audience. The honeymoon was spent at a hunting-box in the Tyrol belonging to the Duke of Loewenstein-Level. Prince Albrecht gave himself up almost entirely to the chase. When it began to get cold in the mountains, they settled at Castle Lindenheim in Franka, which his cousin the Grand Duke had presented to him as usufruct. There, one January day, Siegfried, Baron von Gronendal, first saw the light. His entry into the world caused great difficulties. The court officials did not know how to treat this family event. To ignore it? That would be against all tradition, and would have a disconcerting effect on the citizens of Franka. But the date! the date! That must in no case be publicly stated. As a matter of fact the official organ preserved silence at the time, and only four months later announced the existence of a son of Prince Albrecht, when he was baptized in the presence of the Grand Duke.

A marriage concluded under such circumstances might have been very unhappy. But, thanks to the cleverness and power of adaptation of the Baroness von Gronendal, it turned out well. She took pains to study the aristocratic persons among whom she now moved, and as soon as she came to understand them, she cleverly succeeded in making herself liked by nearly all of them.

She put forward no claims of any sort, and her modest bearing disarmed haughtiness on the part of others. She demanded no rank at Court, and gratefully received what was offered her. In the family circle she soon took the secure position of a relative, and on ceremonial occasions, or when foreign visitors were present, she kept away, so that there might be no question of etiquette.

She quickly won the liking of the Grand Duke. He had a weak point which made him hers at once. He thought himself a divine-inspired artist, and had indeed some slight talent for music and poetry. He wrote dramas, composed operas, and invented ballets. He found a sympathetic collaborator, and an ever-flattering admirer of his works, or more correctly of his intentions, in the Baroness von Gronendal. For he never got beyond intentions. He hummed what he took for themes and melodies. Josephine harmonized them, and wrote them down. He related plots for dramas and scenes; she built them up, and developed the dialogue. If the thing turned out at all tolerable, he was pleased with himself. If it turned out commonplace, he was displeased with his collaborator. And as Josephine never contradicted him, the most perfect harmony reigned between them. Through intercourse with his cousin, the Duke discovered in himself leanings towards the stage which seemed to him vocation and talent. Occasionally he organized performances at the Castle before a select court-circle; they kept him pleasantly excited for weeks at a time with costumes, scenic decorations, the assigning and studying of parts, rehearsals, and stage fever. The Grand Duchess, a weak, quiet, childless woman, who hitherto had had much to complain of in her husband, recognized that the new member of their circle had a favourable influence on the

Grand Duke. She gave Josephine her affection, and extended it also to little Siegfried. She was and remained the only relative who ever gave him a smile, a kind word, a caress.

Josephine understood how to make Prince Albrecht's life pleasant. She never interfered with him. She never worried him. She had her own interests, with which she did not importune him; he had his, into which she never sought to intrude. She was in secret the secondary director of the Court theatres of Loewenstein and Franka; she summoned stars from Vienna, who, for her sake, came for little remuneration, and occasionally introduced them to the Grand Duke, for which he, with his adoration of the fair sex, was grateful. Prince Albrecht devoted himself to hunting in the Grand Duke's famous forests, and made a collection of antlers which still forms the most notable feature of Castle Lindenheim. If he wanted amusement, Josephine recalled her early days, played lively waltzes, sang songs in the Viennese dialect, in which, so far away from his native town, he took the greatest delight, and performed character dances in the costume of her girlhood. If he was bored by the monotony of the Court—a thing that happened two or three times a year—he took a pleasure trip to the Royal courts of his brothers and cousins, in Atlantis, Gotheim, and Hageland, or to Vienna, where his mother and sisters had become reconciled with him. Josephine always let him take these journeys alone. He did not invite her to accompany him, and she did not desire to go. Without a word she spent weeks as a grass widow, and did not worry the prince with letters. Despite his undisguised egoism, he appreciated her discretion, and on his return rewarded her by taking her to watering-places or towns where there was no question of presenting himself at Court. If he met royalties, he introduced his wife with all consideration. He especially interested himself in the theatre and in concerts, and allowed Josephine to introduce all sorts of artistic people to him. That gave her great satisfaction, but it was counterbalanced by certain unpleasantnesses. The prince travelled as a Royal Highness, and that cost money. It

did not trouble him, for he had absolutely no idea of the value of money. It was his wife's task to keep house with his meagre allowance, to moderate and rule his expenditure in a way that should not press on him, and should, indeed, be scarcely observed by him. That was the hardest part of her obligations, and it must be said that her married life was often a hard struggle, made harder since the purveyors and creditors of the Baroness von Gronendal were much less considerate than those of his Royal Highness Prince Albrecht would have been. So far as she could the baroness kept these financial importunities from reaching the prince, and he was very grateful to her. He often said, in his rough, kindly way—

"Do you know, Pepi, I am well satisfied with you. I married my steward like other men marry their cook."

He spoke quite honestly. He had forgiven her for having been obliged to marry her, and they had become good comrades, who would not willingly forego each other's society. But he could not forgive Siegfried. He had been the cause of his forced marriage, and he made the child atone for his unwilling fault through an invincible indifference, which later seemed to develop into positive dislike.

Josephine's relations with the family gradually became pleasanter. After a while, her mother-in-law invited her and Siegfried to stay with her at Vienna in the Loewenstein Palace, and allowed her to call her "Mamma," when they were alone. The King of Atlantis and the Bourbon brother-in-law and his wife were almost intimate, and only the duke, who had to make the allowance out of the entail, remained cold, because his sister-in-law was sometimes obliged to make forcible struggles in order to get him to open his fast-closed hand just a little. Evil tongues repeated to her that he accused her of enriching herself and her tribe of relations. The slander hurt her the more since she had broken off all personal intercourse with her family. She carried on a cold correspondence with her parents at rare intervals, until their comparatively early death. She never saw her brother and sister again. When her brother, who held a small official post, married, and

quickly became the father of a large family, she made him a small yearly allowance out of her own property. She had a strange idea of duty. She persuaded herself that she must sacrifice all former relations to her position, and that she owed it to her noble husband to avoid carefully the barest chance of intercourse that might still further lower his standing.

After nearly two decades of friendly relations with the Grand Duke, the wretched financial question caused a breach. There were once more debts and creditors; ordinary purveyors, jewellers, and even hotel-keepers became pressing, and getting no satisfaction at Castle Lindenheim, did not scruple to importune the Grand Duke himself. He took it very ill, and roundly gave the Baroness von Gronendal to understand at the first opportunity that when a woman had the good fortune to attain to the highest social summit, it behoved her to cultivate feelings which were consonant with the dynastical point of view. The baroness, greatly irritated, ventured to reply that she certainly possessed such feelings, but they seemed, however, to be lacking in her husband's highborn relatives, since, notwithstanding their great wealth, they refused to move a finger to help the prince when he was in difficulties. The prince, who was a witness of this unpleasant quarrel, felt himself obliged to take his wife's part. He complained bitterly that he was kept as short as in his lieutenant days, and told the Grand Duke that a single word from him would bring his brother the duke to reason. One word brought forth another, and the angry Grand Duke so far forgot himself as to make an insulting allusion to the low maternal origin of the new Austrian line of the house of Loewenstein. All the members of the Level branch were extraordinarily sensitive on that point. Prince Albrecht broke with the Court, and the very next day vacated Castle Lindenheim. The Grand Duke repented his hasty words; he was sorry to have to do without the baroness, to whom he had grown accustomed, but he was too obstinate and haughty to be the first to tender the olive branch, and his dignity, as the person offended, forbade Prince Albrecht any advance that might look like self-humiliation.

The princely family, accompanied by Bertha, who had not stirred from the baroness's side for twenty years, Frau Büchler, formerly Siegfried's nurse and his constant attendant, and the prince's Polish valet went for a few weeks to a quiet watering-place in the Taunus, and then settled in Paris. That was the result of long discussions and deliberations. If they did not give up the advantages and distractions of a metropolis and retire to Switzerland or to some provincial hole, Paris was the only place in Europe where the prince had no dynastical or Court obligations, where he need make no sacrifices for his rank, and where he would be submitted to no control.

The baroness, as once before, during the period of her engagement, dipped deeply into her own property, and bought the pretty house in the Cité Dubois in the Rue Palestrina. The prince should not, like any ordinary person, live in a rented apartment, and rub shoulders with Brown, Jones, and Robinson on a common staircase. The prince took it all as a matter of course, and entered into possession of the new home his wife had prepared for him.

Prince Albrecht had been a frequent guest at the Tuileries, and had had relations with Imperial society under the empire. His elder sister's husband was a member of the Bourbon family. He felt himself obliged to visit his relatives, but they were reserved and cold, and the connection was not maintained. If he did not wish to lead a hermit's life, he must enter the circle which the baroness created for herself, and which, corresponding with her tastes, consisted chiefly of artists, actors, and authors. The prince did not feel at home in that society. It was too intellectual, and talked too fast. He liked slow, scanty talk, and abhorred wit, that enemy and disturber of comfortable, lazy conversation. He often stayed away from his wife's receptions and dinners, and she had to excuse him by alleging illness. In his absence the guests adopted the habit of addressing the baroness as "princess" and "your highness." When the prince first heard it, he frowned, and looked indignantly and inquiringly at his wife. She blushed and turned away her face. As soon as they

were alone he frankly told her he did not like it. She burst into tears, and contented herself with saying—

"I have never pretended to be anything I was not. I can't help it if these republicans do not understand what a morganatic marriage is. Explain it to them, if you like."

He did not do that, he only sulked when any one called her "princess" in his presence, and spoke of her himself as baroness.

The death of the old duchess, which took place somewhat suddenly about this time, brought the prince and the baroness a great disappointment. Considering her large personal fortune, they had hoped to be remembered in her will. But she left them a proportionately small sum, scarcely enough to pay off their old debts, and devised a small pension to her second son. She knew her eldest son and heir well enough to express emphatically her expectation that he would not in the future reduce the allowance which Prince Albrecht had hitherto received, on account of the pension his mother had left him. She left her daughter-in-law her blessing, couched in cold, pious terms, and the grand piano on which she had formerly played for her husband's love, which would be sent to Paris, carriage paid. The baroness felt herself mocked at by this contemptuous treatment. She did not ascribe the insult to the old duchess, but to the evil wit of the duke; she knew his ironical turn of mind, and believed he had prompted the duchess with every appearance of bland innocence.

The increase of income permitted a somewhat freer life, but the hope of a secure future for the son was dashed to the ground, and the family were legally dependent on the favour of the holder of the entail. That widened the breach between Prince Albrecht and his brother, and the prince gave up hunting in his preserves, hard as it was to do so.

The society that frequented the house in the Rue Palestrina became more and more mixed as time went on, a circumstance that was unavoidable if it was to be held together. The guests asked permission to introduce

friends; a refusal might mean a breach. The persons who were anxious to make the acquaintance of a real prince belonging to a reigning family, who had become easily accessible through his misalliance, were naturally not the most desirable. Snobs who wanted a highness on their visiting lists, decoration hunters without official position or relations with the diplomatic circles, nobles of doubtful, or of their own, creation for whom appearance in a prince's drawing-room would mean a sort of recognition of their questionable patent of nobility, were more numerous in the baroness's house than persons of undoubted social rank, or than authors and artists of reputation. The baroness succeeded in arranging her acquaintances in two divisions, and in keeping them quite apart from each other. Without such foresight, those acquaintances who had no ulterior motive in going to see her, and undoubtedly the prince himself, would have avoided her drawing-room. Even so, Prince Albrecht felt himself more and more uncomfortable in his own house, and escaped from the Villa Josephine as often as he could to breathe the freer atmosphere of the neighbouring courts of Gotheim and Hageland. About three years after they had settled in Paris, the prince contracted a severe cold on a journey to Gotheim one stormy night, to which the big, apparently enormously strong man, scarcely fifty years old, quickly succumbed. The comparatively happy and brilliant period of the baroness's life was at an end, and she began to wander along a road of sorrow.

People who called themselves her friends put it in her head that there was no such thing as a morganatic marriage before the law, that ancient legal decisions of a princely house might count in the Grand Duchy of Loewenstein, but nowhere else in the world, and that she was the rightful Princess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level. She believed these sanguine counsellors, and from now onwards made it her life's task to secure for her only son, to whom she could leave no property, what was, in her opinion, his proper rank and title. She was determined, if necessary, to take up the quarrel with the family. If the family actually disinherited and denied her son's rights,

she thought of another way in which to gild his title. There were plenty of American millionaires with daughters who would like to be called your highness and to be related to the Queen of Gotheim. Then he would have the wealth without which a title in our days is a mockery, and she did not doubt that, sooner or later, the family would become reconciled with the possessor of an enormous trans-Atlantic fortune.

She began her campaign in the very presence of the prince's dead body. She announced his death to the Royal and noble relatives and Imperial patrons in Vienna by a telegram, and boldly signed herself "Princess Josephine von Loewenstein." The announcement made a deep impression on those to whom it was sent, as she was soon to discover. Not one of them replied. Gotheim and Hageland expressly refused any acknowledgment. The telegram to the Grand Duke was returned with the legend, "To be returned to the sender, the Baroness von Gronendal in Paris." A Court secretary wrote officially from Vienna that his master had been unpleasantly surprised by the form of the announcement, and out of respect for the deceased Schwandtner, begged to warn his daughter, who had now lost her chief support, to beware of false counsellors.

The baroness had the prince's body embalmed. By no means intimidated by the animosity of the family, she telegraphed again to the Grand Duke, to ask him if he desired Prince Albrecht to be buried in the family vault at Loewenstein. She waited five days, and as no answer was forthcoming, she bought a large grave in the cemetery of Mont Parnasse, and had the prince buried there. The funeral cost fifteen thousand francs, and was most gorgeous. As the prince had possessed the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour—it had been conferred on him by Napoleon III. at his first visit to the Tuileries—the burial was conducted with much military display. But neither the French Government nor the family of Loewenstein-Franka nor Bourbon was represented. The newspapers printed long, highly coloured reports of the ceremony, and mentioned that her Highness the Princess

of Loewenstein-Franka-Level and Prince Siegfried had accompanied Prince Albrecht to his last resting-place. Three days later, there appeared in the official organ of Franka a short notice in widely-spaced lines, curt and sharp as the guillotine, which said that the Parisian papers mentioned a Princess Josephine and a Prince Siegfried of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level; there were no persons of those names, and if any one in Paris claimed such a title, he was guilty of a gross fraud.

A dozen anonymous friends hastened to send the baroness the paper. It stabbed her to the heart, but only determined her to continue the war. She concealed the disagreeable notice from Siegfried, and as no other paper copied it, on account of its harsh style, and as the Franka paper was not a world-famous journal, not only Siegfried but Parisian society in general were ignorant of the paragraph.

The baroness erected a magnificent tombstone to the prince, that bore beneath his coat-of-arms and various titles the inscription: "To her never-to-be-forgotten husband from his inconsolable widow, the Princess Josephine." Knowledge of it came to Loewenstein, and steps were taken in a semi-official way to induce the Municipality of Paris to order the words to be effaced. The Municipality advised the complainants to go to law. They feared, however, that the courts of Paris might decide in the baroness's favour, and so secure her a rightful title, which so far, in accordance with the Loewenstein interpretation of the law, she did not possess. They punished her in another way. The "Almanach de Gotha," which was published two months after Prince Albrecht's death, did not record it, and omitted the baroness's name. She, with her son, was banished from the consecrated circle. She replied by offering money to an inventive genius to publish a "Club-Almanac." An attempt was made to circulate it in cosmopolitan society with a great flourish of trumpets, and the princess and Prince Siegfried appeared in its genealogical tables in their rightful places among the members of the House of Meissen. This caused great annoyance in Franka and Vienna, and the

allowance, which was paid quarterly, was reduced on the next occasion by a third. The baroness wrote to the Duke demanding a widow's jointure of suitable amount, and sent a list of the debts the prince had left, the cost of the funeral and the tombstone, on the payment of which she insisted. When she received no answer, she threatened legal proceedings, and when that produced no effect, she actually instructed her lawyer to begin. His respectfully composed paper was most ungraciously received and firmly nonsuited by the ducal courts in Vienna.

These disputes and excitements filled the year of mourning. So far, the war, if bitter, had been carried on quietly and privately. Now it was to be waged publicly, and Siegfried, whom the baroness had at first kept out of the struggle, was to take part in it.

Bertha, her mistress's confidant, was initiated into her plans. With deep regret she saw the advent of a period of excitements and worries without the least likelihood of a satisfactory result. Her egoism counselled her to play the part of rats in a sinking ship. Her native kindliness strove against such counsel, but it would not take many evenings like this to turn the scale in favour of egoism.

BOOK II

WHEN on the evening of Madame Abeille's party the baroness retired to her bedroom after her conversation with Siegfried, he remained alone in the dining-room. He felt too excited to sleep. He lighted a cigarette and went into the garden. Nero lay in front of his kennel behind the steps that led into the house. The enormous animal barked loudly when he saw the young man, got up, sprang on him, and then bent down before him. Siegfried stroked his large fine head, and the dog, keeping step with him, strolled along the winding gravel walk. The full moon rode high in the heavens, and its light gave a pearl-like effect to gravel, foliage, grass and masonry. Siegfried looked thoughtfully at the pale colour of all the various surfaces, and said half aloud to his four-footed companion—

"Look, Nero; the garden is wearing its silver uniform to-night."

The dog looked at him and wagged his tail so violently that it made a loud noise each time it knocked against Siegfried's leg.

The remark had a special significance. The light-green livery of the Grand Ducal court was generally trimmed with cotton lace. On great occasions, however, the trimmings were of silver, and the court servants called it the silver uniform. The association of ideas led Siegfried's thoughts to Franka, and, as was often the case, he became absorbed in the remembrance of his joyless youth.

He had grown up between his nurse, Frau Büchler, and his tutor, Dr. Pelgram. The first had been there

from time immemorial, the second had come when he was nine years old. Frau Büchler had taken Siegfried when he was weaned. She was a Viennese by birth, had lost her husband, a petty court official, and likewise two children; she was alone in the world, and when she, a quiet, sorrowful woman of forty, entered Castle Lindenheim she could give all the feeling she possessed to her little charge. The mother soon saw that she could fully rely on the careful little matron, and gave her the whole care and responsibility of the child. Frau Büchler brought him up quite alone, and received her salary even after he was grown up. She lived with him in Paris, and was the only person in the house with whom he never lost his temper.

Dr. Pelgram was his tutor for ten years. Siegfried did not go to a public school. He was educated at home under Dr. Pelgram's superintendence. When he was nineteen, he passed the final examination with great difficulty, and with all admissible and some other exemptions. It was understood that Dr. Pelgram had finished his work, the Grand Duke conferred on him the title of professor, and as a recognition of his services to Siegfried he was received into the public school service of Franka. The relations between tutor and pupil were not broken off. They corresponded, and every year Pelgram spent a few days in Paris when, according to his custom, he visited his brother at Gotheim, who was private secretary and librarian to the queen, and had indeed procured him the post of tutor to Siegfried. There was no great affection between the pupil and his former tutor. Dr. Pelgram was too cold, too sarcastic, too prudently reserved to attract the devotion and affection even of a happy disposition, but he took the right amount of interest in Siegfried, who respected him, and felt sure that he would find him a sensible and sound adviser in all the difficult circumstances of life.

A child is usually a bond of union between his parents. That Siegfried had never been. Prince Albrecht did not love him. His unconscious, impulsive racial feeling gave him a repulsion for the half-blood in whom the

Loewenstein type showed more perfect and handsome than the veritable scions of the house. He bore him a grudge as the compulsory cause of the misalliance, which he always repented whenever he reflected on himself and his life, a thing, fortunately, that rarely happened. Josephine read her husband's simple mind clearly. She saw that he did not relish Siegfried's presence, and she had no intention of frightening Prince Albrecht away. So, in order that the child should not keep him away from her, she kept the child away from him. Thus Siegfried lived a lonely, dull existence in a wing of Castle Lindenheim, first with Frau Büchler and then with Dr. Pelgram, and a servant. He never accompanied his parents on their travels. He never appeared when there were noble visitors. He would never have gone to the Grand Ducal castle if the Grand Duchess had not occasionally expressly desired it. The boy, who was shy, sulky, and unamiable to everybody else, was at his ease and happy with the kindly princess, and the childless woman took a sad pleasure in his innocent adoration, in which a reserved yet deep love and admiration sought expression. The natural, simple disposition of the Grand Duchess dimly felt that the innocent child had been greatly sinned against both before and after his birth, and that it was the duty of his father's family to make some compensation.

When Siegfried grew older, the intercourse could no longer be carried on in this harmless fashion. She still allowed him to call her aunt among her intimate circle, and always remembered his birthday by some affectionately chosen offering. Another heart that he conquered was that of the Queen of Gotheim. Although his parents made a practice of keeping him away from all family gatherings, he saw the queen by chance on one of her visits to Franka at a great Court banquet. He was then a lanky awkward youth of sixteen, who did not know what to do with his long arms and legs, and in his agony about the terrible order of precedence leaned against the wall far from his father, who shone in the unapproachable distance, and separated also from his mother, who had a place in the first rank of those who were not

royalties. When the queen caught sight of him, she stopped, surprised, and asked the Grand Duke, who was leading her through the hall, who the young man was? He was the very image of her ever-adored husband, as she had learnt to know and love him when he was a youth of nineteen, and the unexpected likeness set her life back twenty years. The Grand Duke could not avoid introducing his nephew. Prince Albrecht, for whom the queen had some regard, joined the group; the queen spoke a few courteous words to the blushing, embarrassed youth, reproached his father for never having introduced the baron to her, and expressed a wish that he should bring him with him the next time he visited her. Prince Albrecht would have made a grimace had he not learnt in childhood to control his feelings. But a wish expressed by the queen was a command, and Siegfried accompanied him on his next visit to Gotheim. That was the first and only time that he went abroad alone with his father. The memory of that week in Gotheim was a nightmare. Prince Albrecht did not trouble about him at all, hardly spoke to him, introduced him to nobody. The Court society treated him politely when they saw that the queen kept him near her person, and although she did not talk to him much, she paid him many little motherly attentions. The presentations, however, were made by the Grand Marshal, who always called him "Baron von Gronendal," and made no allusion to his relationship to Prince Albrecht. Ceremony made his father even a greater stranger here than he was at home, and the misery of it all so oppressed him that he would have been guilty of a boyish escapade, namely, of escaping from the Castle some dark night, had he not found a support in the queen's secretary, his tutor's brother, who took some interest in him.

After the examination, the Grand Duke Hilarius received Siegfried and his tutor, acknowledged his indebtedness to Dr. Pelgram, and dismissed him graciously, with the announcement that he had been appointed a professor.

Left alone with Siegfried, he asked him cheerfully—

"Now, my dear Siegfried, what are your plans? Are you going to be a soldier or a scholar?"

"I haven't yet thought about it," was Siegfried's answer, which affected the Grand Duke unpleasantly. For he had reckoned on the young man replying joyfully, "A soldier, of course."

"Very well, then, think about it now; it's quite time," said the Grand Duke, curtly; and the interview was over.

It did not occur to Siegfried to seek his parents' advice on this weighty question. He felt that they would have nothing helpful to say to him. He consulted Dr. Pelgram.

"What shall I be, sir?"

"A soldier, of course," returned the tutor, without the least hesitation.

"Do you really think that I have a vocation for obedience?" asked Siegfried.

"As far as I am concerned," replied Dr. Pelgram, with his peculiar sarcastic smile, "you have not certainly shown much talent that way, but in the excellent school of the army you may develop it. A small amount of obedience is tempered there by many commands."

Siegfried assumed his most obstinate manner, and shook his head.

"What do you want to be, my dear Baron Siegfried?" asked Dr. Pelgram.

"Independent," he replied,

"That is the dream of a self-sufficient boy. No one who belongs to an organized society is independent. Even our Grand Duke is not. Nothing prevents you from rising to a generalship in the army, and that seems to me to be a goal high enough for your ambition," observed the tutor, who, seeing he could not convince Siegfried, left the matter alone. He was no longer the young man's tutor, had no further responsibility for his actions, and felt no necessity to continue the discussion from pure love of the art. So he concluded the decisive interview with the words, "You asked for advice. I have given you the best I know. You are, of course, free to do as you choose."

A few days passed, during which Siegfried was more reserved than usual. Then, to Prince Albrecht's undisguised astonishment, Siegfried, one day, at dinner, the only occasion on which he saw his father, if he was not hunting or travelling or dining at the palace, informed him shyly and curtly of his interview with the Grand Duke.

The prince frowned, and remarked, "The Grand Duke has said nothing to me. It was very kind of him to trouble about your future. Why didn't you say that you left the decision in his hands?"

"He expressly left it to my judgment," returned Siegfried.

"You don't know what's seeming," said his father, so angrily that Josephine said, imploringly—

"But, my angel, don't get so excited."

The warning had some effect, but the prince was out of temper.

"Well, have you thought it over?" he asked Siegfried.

"Yes, papa."

"Then which arm of the service is it to be?" said his father.

"I don't want to go into the army, papa," replied Siegfried.

"What! Not go into the army! Well, indeed! What, then, do you want to be? A musician, perhaps?" he said.

Both Siegfried and Josephine turned crimson; but the prince either did not notice it, or did not care. His son boiled with anger at the cruel speech, and said firmly—

"A musician needs talent, and every one hasn't got it. It can't be borrowed. There are many things I should like to do, but I do not know of what I am capable. Therefore I will study. In the course of my studies light will probably come to me."

His son's unusually long speech annoyed the prince.

"In our family," he said, "we are not in doubt what we shall be and of what we are capable. Your case, however, is different."

"Exactly so," replied Siegfried, so calmly and boldly that his parents were extremely surprised. "If I were a

prince and a highness, I should not have to break my head over my profession and my capability; but, as I am not——"

"Kindly speak only when I ask you to," was all that Prince Albrecht, in his irritation, found to reply.

He said nothing further to his son about his future. Later, when they were alone, and Josephine returned to the subject, he grumbled out—

"The boy can do what he likes. If he wishes to study, let him study. That's all the fashion now in our circles. Only it mustn't cost too much."

"That shall be my business," Josephine assured him; and so the matter dropped.

Siegfried went to the University, where he was well received as a prince incognito. He joined in all the amusements and the drinking and duelling of the students, and troubled little about lectures. This lasted for just over a year. Then came the rupture with the Grand Duke, and his parents' decision to live in Paris. His allowance was reduced and thereby his popularity. Under those circumstances, his sojourn at the University was no longer a pleasure, and after a few months he followed his parents to Paris. He felt no pang, for he had never seriously thought of deciding on a profession, and concluding his course of study with an examination.

Thenceforth he lived a barren existence of terrible idleness. Sometimes the tedium of it was so great that he hovered between the maddest plans of adventure and thoughts of suicide; and then he would make a great effort to put more interest into his life. In *dilettante* fashion he tried all sorts of occupations, by preference those that were easiest. He made translations from French into German, and from German into French, and published them in periodicals, thanks to the connections of some of his mother's guests. Instead of his name, he signed them with a little coronet, and it gave him pleasure to be so printed. But the pleasure did not last long, for he soon recognized how very second-rate it was. That his mother took the translating business seriously largely contributed to his disenchantment. She praised him

excessively, as often as he blackened a few white pages, was everlastingly telling her acquaintances of his literary gifts, and assumed a great air of importance when she told him that her recommendation had been successful in getting a French translation of his into her friend Madame Abeille's weekly paper, or a German one into the Frankfort *Salonblatt*, whose editress she had patronized in the Franka days. He felt this importance to be grotesque, and, after a short time, renounced writing, which offered him nothing intellectual, in order to dawdle away his time uselessly in sport. He bicycled, frequented a shooting-gallery, and for the first time in his life persevered long enough to become a crack pistol-shot. Even Prince Albrecht was interested, for acquaintances had told him of his son's prowess. As a first-class rifle-shot himself, he could appreciate skill with other weapons, and of his own impulse was present at a competition in which Siegfried came in second. But he took great offence because the *Vercingetorix* repeatedly spoke of "Prince Siegfried" in its report of the contest, and he never again troubled himself about his son's favourite pursuit. Less harmless than all this were visits behind the scenes of second-rate theatres. Two young men, guests of his mother, the Barons Dorman, were his devoted pilots on these pleasing expeditions. The ladies to whom the experienced brothers introduced him, treated him as a prince, and expected the same in return, but his pocket-money was not adequate, the less since the Dormans possessed an admirably developed talent for letting other people pay for their pleasures. So Siegfried got into difficulties out of which his mother had to drag him, and thus his self-respect underwent humiliation.

His father's brief illness and death woke him from the stagnation which had lasted for two years. On his death-bed, Prince Albrecht was as indifferent and egotistical as he had been during his whole life. There was no expression of feeling, no affectionate drawing together of father and son, and before Prince Albrecht knew how seriously ill he was, he closed his eyes for ever. Siegfried felt no sorrow at his death. Indeed, he pitied himself most

deeply that he, an only son, could not, at the moment of his father's death, feel the slightest grief, or any of the emotions that men mostly feel at such times. It seemed to him that he was not only shut out from his own natural circle, but also from humanity itself. The sense of loneliness overpowered him so greatly as he walked behind his father's hearse with its splendid decorations of nodding plumes and silver statues of angels, at some distance from the masters of the ceremony carrying the ribands and stars of the grand cross on a purple velvet cushion, that tears rose to his eyes. But grief for his loss had nothing to do with his sobs. He wept from impotent anger with the man who had so deeply sinned against him, and out of grief for his own fate that rose before him, as formless and gloomy as heavy, black, heaped-up banks of cloud.

The year of mourning was really a year of mourning for him; but he himself formed the central point of his grief. He continually thought of his future, but did not know in the least how to organize it. He came so far as to envy the servant Janusz from the bottom of his heart. The wily fellow had a fixed round of duties in the present, and for the future, plans, hopes, a goal towards which he strove. But Siegfried had nothing of the kind. Even in his dreams he resembled a rudderless ship driven by momentary moods and fancies as by winds and currents.

His mother was as much a stranger to him as before. The habit of holding aloof from him survived its cause —cowardly consideration for Prince Albrecht. She always had Bertha, her confidant, her adviser, her consoler. She discussed her plans of campaign against the family with her. She thought it unnecessary to entrust her son with them. He learned, however, what she was intending, for Bertha opened her discontented heart to her countrywoman, Frau Büchler, and the old nurse told her charge everything she heard.

To acquire his dead father's title and rank? Why not? That was something tangible. That gave his desires a fixed direction, and with his instability of character, he was even grateful to his mother for showing him

a firm point to which he could attach his thoughts. He thought of nothing but the struggle, he followed its events with increasing excitement, but felt annoyed at his mother's methods of attack. They seemed to him childish and absurd, but it did not occur to him to tell her so. The breach between the two, each so deserving of pity, was irreparable. In his mother's decision to withhold her plans from him and not to claim his co-operation, Siegfried saw lack of confidence and vexatious contempt. But the baroness really left him out of her efforts for quite other reasons. She loved him after her fashion, and even suffered pangs of conscience for her neglect of her maternal duties. She thought to compensate him by sparing him all the fighting. She herself would step into the breach, make the attacks, receive the blows, and finally present him with the victor's prize for which she alone would have bled.

If they could once have spoken frankly to each other, Siegfried would have said, "Mother, why don't you let me share your labours?" and the baroness would have answered, "My boy, I owe you a successful issue, and I wish to strive for it without worrying you. You shall inherit what your parents owe you, without having to sue for it in humiliation." Then, maybe, for the first time in their lives, they would have warmly embraced each other and would have joined hands in order to follow together the end for which they were striving. But they were outwardly stiff and cold, and so remained estranged.

After the disagreeable impressions of Madame Abeille's party and the angry interchange of words with his mother, these memories and thoughts swarmed tumultuously in his head like an ant-hill roughly stirred up by a stick. As he walked up and down, crushing the gravel under foot, he gradually grew calmer, and his bitter mood softened. Unconsciously he was feeling the effects of a new influence in his life. There was a party in one of the neighbouring houses. A fresh, trained woman's voice sang the "Erl-könig," then a skilful hand played the "Moonlight" and "Pathetic" sonatas, and isolated phrases of a violin piece

floated down to him, which at first he did not recognize, for the tones reached his ears in disconnected phrases, and the loud passages were divided from the indistinct murmuring of the soft ones, like the white foam of the billowy crests from the dark, deep troughs of the waves. Involuntarily, he stood still, in order not to lose the broken, melodious tones of the violin, and after a while went into the arbour, where he could hear more comfortably. His suspense was ended when he recognized a concerto by Bach.

Suddenly he heard the house door close softly, and a step glide down the steps and along the gravel path. Nero, who had been lying at Siegfried's feet, raised his head, and gave a short bark. Siegfried laid his hand gently on his cool nose, while a clear strong voice from outside shouted, "Quiet, Nero. Where are you? Come, Nero."

Siegfried recognized Nicoline. He got up out of the basket-chair, the dog sprang to his feet, and the animal and his master met the girl at the entrance to the arbour, overhung with faded woodbine.

The girl, surprised, stood still when the moonlight revealed the two forms.

"Have you also come down, prince?"

He started. It was the first time that she had addressed him by that title. The few times that she had spoken to him, in the short period since her arrival, she had called him Baron Siegfried.

"I was not sleepy. I wanted to smoke another cigarette. But, Nicoline, won't you take cold?"

"I! Don't you see I'm wrapped up in a thick shawl, like an old market woman. And, besides, I'm made of iron. I don't know what a cold means."

Both were silent. Nero audibly licked the girl's hand with his great tongue. The violin concerto in the neighbouring house sounded now loud, and then sank away into a faint wailing. Nicoline and Siegfried listened without saying a word. After a time, they heard subdued hand-clapping in the distance through the closed windows. Then all was still.

"Nothing has such magic as the distant sound of a violin in the night, carried in gusts by the wind. It reminds one of odours from an enchanted garden, over which the breeze has passed," said Nicoline, enthusiastically.

"How sentimental you are!" said Siegfried, somewhat mockingly.

Nicoline threw her head back, smiling.

"I? Sentimental? There you are quite off the line. I beg your pardon, you are in error. But I am keenly alive to every sort of beauty. I can't help it."

"You have no need to make excuses on that account," observed Siegfried.

"Oh yes," returned Nicoline, "there is beauty that is out of fashion. For instance, a garden bathed in moonlight, and filled with unknown music was charming in the time of Geibel. Now it is despised as commonplace or provincial. That's the rule; but I don't worry myself about rules."

Siegfried looked at her sideways, and let his cigarette go out. The beautiful girl wore a silk shawl crossed over her chest and fastened in a knot behind. She had thrown a white lace shawl over her head like a mantilla. A rough impulse stirred in him to draw her violently towards him, and to press her in his arms till she screamed. But he restrained it, and felt ashamed of himself. She stood unsuspicious and trusting beside him; she was living as a guest under his roof. She was entrusted to his mother's care. But he felt uncomfortable to be alone with her at night in the dark arbour, and he said, hesitatingly—

"We should not—stand—here."

"No, we'll sit down for a little;" she answered, and going into the arbour, sat down on one of the four wicker chairs that stood round a garden table.

He looked at her in stupid astonishment, but did not move.

"Aren't you coming in? Are you frightened of me?" she asked merrily.

"You're extraordinary," he murmured, and slowly approached the chair opposite hers

"Am I really?" she replied simply, while he hesitatingly sat down.

Was the girl an impertinent, practised coquette? Was she in search of a vulgar adventure, like a servant girl on her Sunday out? or was it proud, modest unconsciousness, the calm trust of innocence? He had only known her now for a few days, although in former years he had seen her as a little girl fairly often. But since her arrival, he had not been alone with her. He only knew so far that she was beautiful and high-spirited, and he guessed that she was clever. He guessed it both by what she said and by what she did not say, and by the confident way in which she treated his mother, outwardly submissive, inwardly independent. Unhappily, he did not in the least know how he ought to treat her. Chivalry and the bad habits which he had contracted as a student and as a constant visitor behind the scenes of second-rate theatres fought in him for mastery, and the victory was still very doubtful, when Nicoline further astonished him with the question—

"Have you a cigarette, prince?"

"What! Do you smoke?" he said.

"Oh, only rarely, and in secret; but that makes it all the nicer. Mamma has forbidden it—mammas always forbid—that seems to be their work in life—and I do not wish to annoy her. I can't very well go into a shop here and buy a packet of cigarettes. In Diesa, my girl friends get me what I want. So I must make you the accomplice of my crimes. Will you help me, prince?"

Siegfried was not quick at repartee. Silently he handed her his cigarette case, struck a match, and its light revealed to him a roguish smile on Nicoline's face. He received the impression that she was poking fun at him, and that made it easier for him to keep cool.

She pulled strongly at the cigarette, so that the fragrant smoke filled the arbour. The point of glowing light opposite him hypnotized him. Both kept perfectly still, for a numerous stream of people, laughing and talking in low tones, poured out of the neighbouring house into the road leading to the Cité Dubois. Nero had

jumped up and bounded to the garden gate, where he treated the passers-by to his threatening bark.

"Do you like Paris?" asked Siegfried, in order to say something.

"Oh, a week has not spoiled the enchantment," exclaimed Nicoline. "How good and sweet it is of the princess to have me here! I'm so grateful to her. And also to my poor mamma, who actually managed to make up her mind to part with me."

"Your mother is very fond of you?" observed Siegfried.

Nicoline answered in surprise, "Yes. Isn't that always the way?"

"No," he replied, curtly and sternly.

She threw the remains of her cigarette away.

"Will you have another?" asked Siegfried.

"No; one is enough," she said. "I don't believe you, prince. A mother always loves her children. A father—well, that is different."

"Oh, a father!" murmured Siegfried, and so much bitterness lay in his low voice that Nicoline could not refrain from saying in tender tones, that sounded very differently from her former ones—

"Poor prince! how you say that! And you haven't so much to complain of, either."

"What?" he interrupted hastily; he did not shout, for his voice came through his clenched teeth. "I haven't much to complain of! You are an inmate of our house. You were witness of this evening's dispute. You'll hear many more of the same kind. It would be ridiculous to try and conceal things from you. And there's really nothing to conceal. Don't you see how wretchedly my father has treated me?"

"Prince, prince, no, no! It pains me to hear a son speak so of his father," said the girl.

"'Prince!' I seem to hear mockery in the word," said Siegfried. "And yet when you call me 'baron,' I feel vexed and annoyed, although I have no formal right to feel so. I am almost worse than a foundling. If I were one, I should doubtless, like all foundlings, dream

a wonderful romance about my birth, and imagine myself the unknown son of a king, and read my family history in fairy tales or penny novelettes. The foundling's most extravagant dreams are absolute truth in my case. I am the son of a prince; but if I give myself out for what I am, I am scorned, or persecuted, or both. Why? It is true! By all divine and human laws, I am Prince Albrecht's son, and my nearest relatives, my uncles and cousins, are the greatest emperors and kings of the earth. And I am asked not to regard my father's brothers as uncles, or the children of my father's brothers and sisters as cousins. It is an atrocious outrage."

"What would you have?" said Nicoline. "The law of equality of birth is a law."

"Certainly," replied Siegfried. "I say nothing against that. I make no claim to the succession. And that is the only practical purpose of the equality of birth doctrine. But has any one the right to thrust me out of my natural and legal family because my father had the good taste to marry an artist, who was more beautiful and clever than all our princesses? If it was a crime, my father ought to have been punished for it, not me. I am not guilty."

"You exaggerate," replied Nicoline. "It's not such a terrible punishment to be Baron von Gronendal."

"And to stand alone in the world," returned Siegfried, "denied by your father's family, estranged from your mother's, cheated by your parents of childhood and youth, sacrificed by your mother to a loveless father, without position, without means, without a profession, without an outlook. Ah, Nicoline, I am so unhappy that I often have compassion on myself, tender, tearful, unmanly compassion."

From his voice, Nicoline thought that he was very near crying. He had his back to the moonlight, and she could not see his face clearly. She remained in thought for a time.

"Do you know," she then said, "how you strike me? Like a man standing in a courtyard in front of a wall and wanting to get out, and who is angry that it does not give way before him, while just behind him is a door

set wide open. Turn round, and instead of trying to get through the wall, go quietly through the open door. Everything that you lack and that you wish to have, you can acquire. You are a young giant. Why don't you conquer the world, if you wish to see it at your feet?"

"You think it's an easy matter to conquer the world?" remarked Siegfried.

"If it were easy, it wouldn't be worth the trouble," she returned calmly. "Life is a game. The conquest of difficulties is what makes it exciting and amusing."

"That's not my philosophy," he murmured. "I'm not enough of a sportsman."

Both were silent and followed their own thoughts. Nero had returned, and with a noisy yawn stretched himself at the entrance to the arbour. After a long pause, Siegfried continued—

"I often ask myself if there is something in me that repels people. For I have never had a real friend."

"You are bitter and unjust," said Nicoline. "Old Frau Büchler idolizes you."

"She's paid for it," said Siegfried.

"Prince, that's a cruel remark," replied Nicoline; "you cannot buy love."

"We'll leave good old Büchler out of it," said Siegfried. "But my father had a real antipathy to me. I should like to find the cause in myself, for then I could forgive him. But if it isn't in me, it was pure wickedness in him."

"Not at all," said Nicoline, "it was only thoughtlessness. From all I have heard of Prince Albrecht he was an easy-going gentleman who disliked bothering himself over things. He cannot have been a bad man. He acted honourably towards your mother. If you speak like that of your father, what am I to say of mine?"

He pricked up his ears. "What do you mean?"

"Don't pretend. You know very well," returned the girl.

Siegfried was again astonished at the girl's calm unconcern. Of course he knew what she meant. But that was

just the reason why he had not imagined it possible that she could refer to such a subject.

It was no secret in his circle that Nicoline was the daughter of Prince Johann of Meissen-Diesa-Kupferberg. His relations with Frau Flammert were as well known as such things usually are. He had made the singer's acquaintance when she was a girl, he had married her to Flammert, the director of the Court theatre, and had taken care that from the wedding-day he should always be employed at foreign theatres. Every one unhesitatingly recognized the prince as her protector. And this incomprehensible girl referred calmly to things of that sort.

"Permit me—I mean—in your case——" he stammered in confusion, and stopped, since she was so inconsiderate as to let him speak out.

She was sorry for his embarrassment and said, "In my case, I have been sinned against in a different way. Prince Albrecht fell in love with your mamma and acted as an honourable man should in such a case. He married her."

"Morganatically," muttered Siegfried between his teeth.

"That's all the same. It was a legal marriage. The prince desired no sacrifice on the part of the woman of his choice, but he made a sacrifice for her—I mean from his point of view. He introduced your mother into his circle."

"Which now thrusts her out," interrupted Siegfried.

"The prince can't help that," said Nicoline. "He treated you as his son——"

"Maltreated me rather," returned Siegfried.

"He called you his son, and you called him father. Isn't that so?" replied Nicoline.

Siegfried did not answer.

"And my father," continued Nicoline, "he made my mother's acquaintance when she was a girl, and a brilliant future lay before her. You don't know my mother. You have only seen her casually and rarely on our flying visits to Franka and our brief sojourns in Diesa and Frankfort. You don't know what she is."

"Yes," said Siegfried, "I know how my mother speaks of her."

"Yes, that's all very well; but, to appreciate her properly, you must breathe the same air with her. She is not only the most beautiful and the most charming woman I know, but she is the most inspired artist I have ever set eyes on. She was destined to be a star of the first magnitude. Another Malibran or Patti. And with it all so good and gentle, much too gentle and yielding. She would have become world-famous, and have made millions of money. She would have had the world at her feet. Had she desired to make a man happy with the gift of her hand, she could have chosen from the sons of emperors and princes, perhaps even from emperors and kings themselves. Then Prince Johann crossed her path, and it was all up with everything—everything!" She uttered this with passionate violence, and stamped her foot so that Nero lifted his head in surprise. After a brief pause, she continued, "My worthy papa has accepted every sort of sacrifice from my mamma as a matter of course, and with a calmness that has often secretly amazed me. Oh, my papa is a very great man, and found it quite natural that my mother should throw herself away on him, that she should renounce her career as an artist——"

"She is the ornament of the Diesa Opera," interrupted Siegfried.

"I love my native town," said Nicoline, "but I am unable to regard it as the centre of the universe. Mamma has never left Diesa; she is as if rooted there. She renounced all professional tours, she renounced shining in Paris and London and America. Merely because it wouldn't suit Prince Johann. Because he could neither accompany her nor do without her. Because it's more comfortable for him to have her always at hand. He allowed her no furlough in which to become famous and rich. And so she has always remained the poor little provincial artist, a caged phœnix."

"He has, anyway, been true to her," murmured Siegfried.

"Is that a merit?" exclaimed Nicoline.

"Yes——" began Siegfried.

"It is to my mother's credit that she has been true to him," interrupted Nicoline, "especially since he did her the injury of bestowing on her the name of Flammert. I have never forgiven my papa that."

"But, Nicoline," he cried in horror, "would you have preferred——"

"Yes," she replied, "if, then—— It would have been less hateful, less unpleasant than as it is."

"But the world—the world," observed Siegfried.

"The world?" returned Nicoline. "Has the threadbare and worn-out cloak ever prevented the world from gossiping until its throat was dry, and from slandering my mother's pure, angelic character? No. It was not the act of a great nobleman, but of a wealthy *parvenu* soap-boiler, who thinks himself obliged to make a concession to the *habitués* of his club in the county town. Why was your papa able to marry?"

"Prince Johann was not free," said Siegfried.

"He should have got a divorce from Princess Agnes. And so he would, if my mamma had not been so amiable. I've told her so over and over again," returned Nicoline.

"What! You discuss such things with your mother?" Siegfried's astonishment increased to such an extent that he nearly lost his self-control.

"But, my dear Prince Siegfried, do you take me for a little fool?" asked Nicoline. "Nowadays a girl must not be ignorant. I am not sure if our mothers and grandmothers were more ignorant than we are. Apparently they only pretended. We despise that sort of thing. A human being of twenty is no longer a child. I know quite well that life is a struggle, and much more so for women than for men. I am preparing myself for a serious battle by timely drill."

The military simile acquired a warlike sound through the energy with which Nicoline spoke. Everything about the girl made a strong, almost an intimidating, impression on Siegfried.

"I stick to my opinion," continued Nicoline, after a

short pause, "that it was an incomprehensible act of contempt, and that my mother should not have allowed it. What do you think of my father sitting for years in the royal box beside the Princess Agnes when my mother sang?"

"It would have been difficult to avoid it so long as the princess lived," observed Siegfried.

"Respect and affection for my mother should have led him to make it understood that, when he was obliged to go to the theatre with his wife, she should not appear," insisted Nicoline.

"Did your mother feel it an insult?" asked Siegfried.

"I felt it so when I understood the situation, and that's sufficient. But mamma's too—— Do you seriously think that it could be a matter of indifference to her to display herself on the stage while the other sat in the royal box and criticised her from above?" said Nicoline.

"She was obliged to let herself be criticised by all the rest of the people in the theatre," argued Siegfried.

"That didn't matter to her. She felt far above all of them; but she could not feel herself above the Princess Agnes. Oh, I hate papa for acting towards us in such a fashion; and even now, when he is a widower——"

"Oh, Nicoline, you scolded me for speaking like that of my father, and now you——"

"You are right. I ought not to speak so. And it's not the truth. I say that, but, in fact, Prince Siegfried, you must know that my feelings change most curiously. Often I really do believe that I hate Prince Johann—when he comes to see us, and graciously sends for me, and kindly inquires about my progress, and calmly lets me address him as 'your royal highness.' Of late years I have often nearly said to him: 'This has lasted long enough; either you address me, too, as "royal highness," or I call you "papa." It'll come to it, I assure you."

"I should like to be present," laughed Siegfried.

"Don't dare me. I get quite near enough to it. Yes. At such moments I hate him, and his calmness and his humbug, and that he should treat me like a stranger, and should feed on my dearest mother's life and happiness and

reputation like a heartless parasite. Then, at other times, I feel grateful to him, and am glad he is my father. I am of his blood. He can't take that away from me," concluded Nicoline.

"You're the exact likeness of him, only incomparably handsomer," Siegfried assured her.

"I do not thank you for the compliment," answered Nicoline. "Of course I'm handsomer than he, although the prince is really a good-looking man. I'm of his blood, but freshened and revived and improved by my mother's genius and rich nature. It's very good for princes to step down to the people and to strengthen their race with its unexhausted strength. I think that you and I are good proofs of that."

"You have thought over that too?" he said.

"Of course. You surely don't think that a girl who is descended from the gods of the earth has her head full of stupid, ordinary hobbledehoy dreams?" declared Nicoline. "Am I only to think of my partners or flirtations? Just as if I should! No. I think about my relations to the universe, and what I desire, and what I can, and what I may become. And chiefly, of course, I think of my origin, and of all that it implies. I compare myself with my half-sisters. Do you know them?"

"I saw them at Franka. They wore short frocks then," said Siegfried.

"Now they wear trains, but they're not any more beautiful in consequence," Nicoline assured him. "Poor girls! So wanting in charm! so sour! I always think of unripe gooseberries when I see them. They are royal highnesses, and I am little Nicoline Flammert. But I don't envy them. They pity me? On the contrary, they envy me. You can read that in their irritated expressions when they direct stolen glances at me."

"Yes. Do you think the princesses know——?" asked Siegfried.

"But, really, my dear Prince Siegfried, you have a curious idea of girls. My half-sisters know as well as I do myself. Whenever we meet at the theatre, or in church, they never leave off staring at me. And then I

recognize that the princesses and their dead mother belong to a different species of humanity from me, and not to a better. His royal consort was my father's punishment and my mother's vengeance, and his royal daughters are so still. He and I will not die without my telling him so."

"You won't accomplish that," said Siegfried.

"No, perhaps not. But it would be a satisfaction to my feelings; and happiness, I believe, is only to be found in individual satisfactions—that and others." After a pause, she continued, "The future,—that's another story. My singing will provide that."

"What a shame that I haven't heard you!" complained Siegfried.

"People say that I have inherited my mother's voice. But I hardly dare believe that. The good fairies can't have been so extravagantly generous to me," she laughingly exclaimed.

"You must sing to me, Nicoline."

"What! now, as the Voice of the Night?" she laughed.

"No, but to-morrow, or to-day, rather. It's past midnight," he returned.

"Signora Conti has strictly forbidden me to sing anything except elementary exercises. But that's all the same. You'll have an opportunity of hearing me. I believe in my voice, and I believe in myself. I will work that—no, I won't use ugly expressions. I've already used too many. I'll attain all that Prince Johann prevented my mother attaining. A world-renowned *prima donna* counts for something in these days."

"For a very great deal. It's even a sort of sovereignty," acquiesced Siegfried.

"Yes. And when I grow old and my voice loses its freshness—who knows? I may have meanwhile become an ambassadress—maybe a minister's, or even a prime minister's wife. For I aspire to become that. I will be everything that one can be. It would be amusing if, in the end, I did come to rule a country, not as a woman whom a prince had condescended to marry, but as the man at the wheel, who would then be a woman at the wheel."

"How I envy you the picture you draw of your future!" said Siegfried.

"But, Prince Siegfried, every one's free to do that. I'm not twenty yet, and life stretches out before me immeasurably great and broad, like an enormous hall into which the sun pours through innumerable windows, and which is quite empty, and which I am to furnish. And so I put in it everything that's beautiful and precious. And there's room. What prevents you from doing the same?"

"I've no voice, and I don't care much for politics. I see nothing before me but a hard struggle for my birthright."

"That is something," she exclaimed vivaciously. "That is much. That need only take a very little while, if you go the right way to work."

"The right way to work! What do you consider that to be?"

"I'll tell you what I should do if I were you. I should conquer a native tribe somewhere in Central Africa, or organize a revolution in an interesting nation in the East. A revolution is always the surest way to rise, to rise high. And when you're king of the negroes, or prince of the Balkans, your family will speedily acknowledge you. And then you won't care about their acknowledgment. But that's how things are. You only get a thing when you no longer want it."

"You're an inimitable teller of fairy tales, Nicoline," he said, with a deep sigh.

"Why fairy tales? And Stanley? And Cecil Rhodes? And Prince Henry of Battenberg? There are examples enough! What others have done, you can do. I hold to this point. We can't, of course, compare ourselves with divine spirits. But I consider I'm as good as any being of flesh and blood. What he can do, I can do. Only I must fit myself for it."

"I'm no adventurer," he murmured.

"Stop! A man only admits that when he's unsuccessful. If he's successful, he says something different. Unusual ends are only to be reached by unusual means. Audacity! Necessity gives that. We must have inherited

it with our blood. Not to beg, but to take! That's the way by which our relatives will most surely acknowledge that we belong to them."

He kept silence. His brain worked more quickly than ever in his life before. Imaginary pictures of war campaigns, triumphs, homages, and gorgeous court ceremonials rushed tumultuously through his mind. And he was filled with admiration for this astonishing girl, such as he had never before felt for any human being, not for the kind Grand Duchess, not for the clever, cold, highly cultivated King of Hageland, but a little perhaps for the Queen of Gotheim.

Nicoline shuddered audibly. "B-r-r! It's beginning to get cold."

Siegfried got up so hastily that Nero also was brought to his feet.

"Yes; it's frightfully imprudent to sit like this so late into the night. You must go to bed at once. I can't forgive myself for keeping you up so long."

"But you haven't. I kept you."

She stood up, and he stepped respectfully back while she passed out of the arbour. Outside she stopped, looked at the clear sky, the full moon, the edge of which was cut off by a neighbouring roof, the glistening garden with the china foxes, and walked slowly towards the house.

Siegfried followed her. "I could listen to you the whole night through. I could hardly see you; it was like a mysterious voice, speaking to me out of the darkness."

"Like the Witch of Endor, or the weird sisters in *Macbeth*," she laughed.

"No. I thought rather of an oracle in a shady temple, or of a Valkyrie. Anyway, of a supernatural being who inspires thoughts and projects. I have never been so stimulated by any one in my life as by you in this never-to-be-forgottten hour. You generate energy."

"A kind of Leyden jar."

"Don't laugh, Nicoline. If I had you always near me, then, indeed I might be capable of doing great deeds."

She gave him her hand, and pressed his with masculine strength. "Our paths in life will run parallel for the next year or two. We have the same blood in our veins. Our fates are similar. We are evidently destined to become good friends."

They had reached the door, which Siegfried opened for her. She patted Nero, who had accompanied them to the steps, and then said—

"It must be one o'clock, and to-morrow, at ten, I have my singing lesson with Signora Conti. Good night, Prince Siegfried."

"Good night, Nicoline, thank you," he said softly, and waited below until she had gone upstairs, and had vanished along the corridor. Then he locked the door and sought his room, but it was long before he fell asleep.

The next morning there was much whispering in the house. Janusz, who had eyes and ears everywhere, told the cook, his special friend and confidant, how the young master and Fräulein Nicoline had sat alone together in the cosy dark arbour late into the night or rather into the early hours of the morning, and the cook hastened to spread the news with some embroidery, so that it reached the ears of Bertha, and of old Frau Büchler. The latter reprimanded the cook for her disagreeable remarks. But Bertha repeated the gossip to her mistress when she took her the customary morning chocolate.

Through her heart complaint, restless nights, and sleeping draughts, the baroness was always in a particularly bad temper when she woke up. She was ill-humoured almost to weeping, hopelessly pessimistic, and immensely irritable. Her first action was to tear open the *Vercingetorix*, which Bertha handed her with the chocolate, and to look for the report of Madame Abeille's party. Her countenance brightened as she glanced through it. Bertha seized that moment to tell her the story, mysteriously and importantly, while her voluble tongue stuttered out of the new highness into the old baroness. Her mistress's expression suddenly became gloomy again; she sat up in bed as quickly as her weight allowed her, frowned, and asked—

"How do you know that, Bertha?"

"Janusz saw the bar——, the prince go into the garden, and he remained up because he had to lock up the door for the night," replied Bertha.

"They are a couple of innocent children, but imprudent, as one generally is at their age. They must be cautioned. But don't gossip about it any more. Do you hear, Bertha?"

"Very well, bar——, your highness."

When the princess had finished her morning toilette, she went into her pale blue boudoir. She received an affectionate morning greeting from Bella, the pretty little Scotch terrier, and a much colder greeting from Siegfried. She said, without preamble—

"It's not right for you to hold long conversations with Nicoline in the garden at night. The girl is in my charge, and I don't want her to take cold and be unable to sing. And then it doesn't do for the servants."

Siegfried gave his mother a sharp penetrating glance, and as she seemed quite unconcerned, he replied in a low voice—

"It was quite unpremeditated. Of course it goes without saying that it won't be repeated every night."

"Where's Nicoline?" she continued crossly. "Isn't she awake? Bertha, go and see. It's time she got ready for her singing lesson."

When the maid had left the room, she asked, "Siegfried, have you read the *Vercingetorix*?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Now, who was right? My clever and dignified son, or his stupid and undignified mother?"

Siegfried was silent.

"The Grand Duke Hilarius will give a great jump when he sees the report, and we'll take care that he shall often indulge in such acrobatic feats," said the princess.

Nicoline appeared at the door in a light blue morning gown, went quickly up to the baroness and kissed her hand, while the elder lady touched the girl's smooth brow lightly with her lips. Then she turned unaffectedly to Siegfried, who stood up, gave him her hand, and

looked full at him with a smile, while he gazed at the floor.

The baroness attentively observed their attitude to each other.

"Now, lazy bones, have you slept well?" asked the princess.

"Thank you, aunt, splendidly; and you?"

"Never ask about my nights. And did you have enough sleep?"

There was something in the baroness's tone that made Nicoline turn her head quickly away and blush deeply. She felt her cheeks burn and was very angry with herself. That she changed colour so easily was really intolerable.

"Ah, you mean because I went to bed so late, aunt?" she returned, and looked hard at the baroness.

"It is well that you don't deny——"

"Deny!" she almost screamed. "Aunt——"

"It wouldn't have surprised me. I send you to your room, so that you might be properly rested to-day, and instead of obeying, you go down, and talk your head off for hours. Is that the way to behave?"

Nicoline got visibly angry, but she controlled herself. "Don't be annoyed, aunt. I wasn't sleepy, and instead of rolling about feverishly, I preferred to enjoy the wonderful moonlight. It did me good, for I feel quite fresh and rested to-day."

"Well, well," muttered the baroness, ungraciously. "Don't let it happen again. I am responsible for you, for your health, and everything." She emphasized the "everything" so strongly that a flame passed over Nicoline's face. "I take your mother's place here."

"Thank you very much indeed," replied Nicoline. "My mother would not forbid me anything. She knows me. She knows that I can take care of myself better than anybody else can."

"Don't be so self-sufficient," replied the baroness.

Siegfried could not refrain from defending Nicoline. "It was my fault," he began.

"Please don't trouble to defend me," said Nicoline, almost angrily. "Aunt is anxious about my health, and

I'm very grateful to her. As it didn't hurt me, she has quite forgiven me, haven't you, aunt?"

"H'm," muttered the baroness. "Now, go and dress, so that you may not be late at Signora Conti's. Bertha shall go with you, though it's a little difficult to spare her in the morning."

"But I can quite well go alone——"

"Nonsense. A girl can't walk about the streets of Paris alone. You don't understand."

"I'll go with Nicoline, with the greatest pleasure," suggested Siegfried.

"You're not to be trusted," exclaimed the baroness, irritably. "Go and get ready, Nicoline. Bertha will go with you."

As soon as Nicoline had disappeared, the baroness turned to her son.

"Nicoline is not your sister. You must take care. A young girl is always unprotected."

"Nicoline is an inmate of our house," replied Siegfried. "If intercourse in the house does not harm her, I don't see how our being together in the streets can harm her either."

"And I must really add this worry to all my other worries," grumbled the baroness. "That's what happens when one tries to please everybody. It's a disease."

She spoke some loving words to the lively, barking Bella, and went to her writing-table in order to attend to her correspondence. With a curt nod, Siegfried left the boudoir.

During the next few days, he only saw Nicoline at meals. In the morning she had her singing lesson, and remained to listen to the lessons of the other pupils. In the afternoon she accompanied the baroness when she drove out in her grand state carriage, paid visits, or went to picture galleries, or concerts, or *matinées* at the theatre. In the evening she was, as a rule, left to herself. The baroness insisted that she should go to bed early. If there were guests, Nicoline, often to her great disgust, despite the respectful and flattering intercession of the company, was obliged to withdraw directly dinner was

over. If the baroness went out, which happened almost every night, Nicoline stayed at home alone, wrote letters, or read, or asked Frau Büchler to keep her company, and to tell her her reminiscences of Franka. She thus learnt the detailed history of the Grand Ducal palace and that of Castle Lindenheim, and of the principal and subordinate persons, and was placed, so to speak, at the central point of her godmother's interests.

The baroness's passion for the theatre outlasted all the ups and downs, the joys and disappointments of her life, and filled all the corners of her heart not occupied with titles and rank. She had to make up for the abstinence of the year of mourning, and devoted most of her evenings to the theatre. Siegfried had to accompany her. She generally offered a seat in her box to one or other of her acquaintances, and he would be her guest at dinner, which would be eaten quickly before the performance, at a restaurant. Nicoline was only allowed to be of the party on Saturday evenings, because she had no singing lesson on Sundays, and could stay in bed longer in the morning.

On all these occasions the baroness took care to occupy a conspicuous place. The box was engaged by telephone from the manager of the theatre himself. During the intervals she sent one of the attendants for the director or at least for the secretary, and courteously asked for information about the receipts, the novelties and pieces that were to be produced next. On first nights she asked for the author to be introduced to her, and pleased him with flattering words, and often with an invitation. She received the principal actors in her box, and was delighted when the younger actresses treated her with the familiarity that would have been natural towards a retired member of the profession. She was known to the *personnel* of all the larger theatres. In Prince Albrecht's life-time he had almost always accompanied her, and the artists had crowded round him. The baroness procured small decorations and medals, the title of "Court" actor, and professional engagements for them. That had ceased now. But the baroness

continued to patronize her *protégés* as a great lady. She bestowed on them flowers and even jewels. The men had sleeve-links or breast-pins, the ladies bracelets or lockets, and each piece bore an inscription which gave it a mark of documentary importance.

Nicoline's keen-sightedness soon understood all the details of this business. After a fortnight the house in the Cité Dubois had no big or little secrets from her. She wrote to her mother every day, sometimes long letters, sometimes short ones, and was not content unless she received an answer at least every other day, even if it were only a word on a post-card.

Her letters formed a sort of diary, a continuous account of her observations and impressions, but omitting the most interesting, her own emotions and dreams.

"Poor, kind godmother," she wrote in one of her letters, "I am often forced to laugh at her; but at the bottom of my heart I am frightfully sorry for her. She acts the princess with the most terrifying consequences. She gives jewellery that must cost a great deal of money to her friends among the actors and actresses. Baron Siegfried, who is a great deal cleverer than you think, mummy dear, said yesterday, when the jeweller appeared with an enormously long bill which the baroness could not pay at the moment, 'The Princess of Cyprus's system seems to me more practical than yours, mamma. The decorations which she bestows at least cost nothing.' The baroness was deeply offended and left the room. But Siegfried is right. If only poor godmother had any thanks for her pains! But I really believe that the recipients laugh at her behind her back."

In other letters she described the people who frequented the baroness's house. "It's just like a pigeon-house — an incessant running in and out of people. They are curious figures. First there is Count Laporte, tall, thin, with a hawk's nose, and a heavy, grey moustache. He is a Belgian, and was once an officer. He calls my godmother, 'ma cousine.' For his mother was a Princess Friedrichsberg of Austria, and the Friedrichsbergs are related to the Meissens because sixty or eighty years

ago one of them married a princess of that family. He tells my godmother court and society gossip, but I doubt if there's a word of truth in anything he says. How does he know it all? He can hardly see any one except my godmother, for he is here nearly every day, and sometimes twice. He brags of kings, princes, and ambassadors as if they formed his entire circle, and he talks as if my godmother was in the same set. That's his method of flattery. I asked Siegfried what Count Laporte is, what he has, what he does, and he told me: 'The man lives on lawsuits, which he has been carrying on for twenty years.' 'Does he gain them?' I asked. That seemed to be a naïve question, for Siegfried laughed, and answered, 'It isn't necessary. The chief thing is that they should continue. People are always to be found here who will lend money for lawsuits as long as they are going on.' Did you ever hear of such a thing, mummy dear?

"Then the Barons Dorman. Two brothers with ten years' difference between them. The elder must be about thirty-five. He squints, has a crooked nose, and looks like one of the executioners who nail the Saviour to the Cross in the pictures of the old German masters. I can't bear him. His brother is merely ridiculous. A very small face, a little straw-coloured moustache, little eyes, an everlasting smile on his little round mouth, little pink cheeks which at first I thought were rouged, a little piping voice, altogether a most unattractive creature! He made some little attempts to pay me attention, but was sensible enough to see that he was wasting his time, and now honours me by taking no notice of me. They come of a good Bonapartist family, their father was prefect under the second Empire, and their grandfather general under the First. They are like regular boarders at my godmother's. They fill the office of ambassador with her, and with Siegfried that of *maîtres de plaisir*. If I had the right, I would warn him of these parasites. But I have no right!

"The Dormans are always introducing the most extraordinary people to my godmother. The day before

yesterday they brought an elderly gentleman, a M. Tissier de Lage, who made the impression of an idiot on me. He devotes his life to the defence of that Naundorff who is said to have been the son of Louis XVI., and has written a whole library of books on his lost cause. You'll never guess what brings him to my godmother! Don't try, mummy dear. He makes her bows at an angle of a hundred and twenty degrees—it was easy to measure, for Siegfried stood by straight as a column—and after a generous flow of compliment, this came out: the testimony and proof that Naundorff was Louis XVII. were to be found at Potsdam, but the Government jealously guarded the papers, and a request from M. Tissier to be allowed to see them was curtly refused, although it was made through the German embassy. So he ventured to ask my godmother if she would help him with her powerful influence at the Court of Berlin; he felt quite sure that her intercession would procure him what he wanted. And now, think of it, mummy, my godmother gave the old gentleman her hand to kiss, smiled at him graciously, and actually promised to say a good word for him at Berlin. And I sat by and heard it. Poor godmother!

"The case of the celebrated Saint-Denis is similar. You must certainly know him by name. He is one of the best known and most liked actors here, and really an admirable artist. I like him immensely on the stage. But in ordinary life! Such egotism is almost incredible. And the mixture of tasteless familiarity and servility towards my godmother! Prince Albrecht promised him a trivial Meissen decoration, but died before he had obtained it. Now the booby hovers round my godmother in order to obtain his little order, and is weak enough to believe that she can procure him the riband.

"I really do not understand my godmother. Her most intimate friend here is Madame Abeille, a tall, stout sort of female dragoon with a visible moustache. I went to my first party in Paris at her house. She edits an important weekly paper, and takes herself for a great politician. To listen to her you would believe

that she makes and unmakes ministers, concludes and breaks treaties, and holds all the threads of diplomacy in her really uncommonly strong hand. She was here, as often, to-day, and talked to my godmother about *la haute politique*. The two solemn ladies made universal history in grim earnest. I have never seen anything more approaching to farce on the stage. Madame Abeille haughtily demanded the return of Alsace-Lorraine. My godmother opposed at first, and wished to make conditions. But Madame Abeille would not give way an inch, and in the end my godmother yielded. Then Madame Abeille embraced her friend, and shouted in exultation, 'Yes, my dear princess, that's what we must do. The young emperor has a noble, lofty mind. We may expect chivalrous conduct from him. And you will be the greatest benefactress of two famous empires, and deserve everlasting glory if you bring about so desirable an event.'

"That wasn't enough to ease her mind, and so she turned to me, sitting dumb and stupid in my corner, and caused me much internal amusement.

"'See, my lovely child, that is our high mission. We women must step between brutal men and reconcile them.'

"'The eternal Sabines,' I observed wittily. She rushed at me, squeezed my head between her strong hands, kissed me on the brow, and exclaimed—

"'Bravo! as ready at repartee as a little French girl.'

"This is all in strict confidence, mummy dear. I believe the princess is greatly worried about money. Something is not right with her jointure, for uncomfortable disputes often occur between mother and son, carried on even in my presence, so that I feel embarrassed and get away if I possibly can. There is incessant ringing at the bell. You're for ever meeting jewellers, dressmakers, keepers of the restaurants where my godmother gives her little dinners, in the hall with their bills, and they mostly go away as they came. My godmother is callous, but Siegfried visibly suffers under these circumstances. He reproaches his mother in a way that I find hard, but he is really in the right. 'Mamma,' he said yesterday, when a creditor was again dismissed with his bill unpaid, 'this can't go on.

Where is the sense in feeding a pack of spongers every day, giving them champagne to drink, and getting into debt with jewellers for a pack of actors?' My godmother did not allow him to get any further.

"'Be quiet!' she exclaimed in a passion; 'there's nothing high bred about you. You've no feeling and no understanding for the situation. I know what I owe my angel prince. I know how to defend my rank as his widow.'

"'Through drinking champagne that hasn't been paid for,' he said drily. My godmother burst into tears and fell back in her chair. Bertha sprang forward with the ether bottle; Siegfried left the room. It wasn't pretty. His 'pack of actors' offended me. He should have remembered that his mother was an actress, that you are one, and that I shall be one. He is not considerate. But is it possible to be so when you are embittered? Alas! my only mother, I begin to think over things. Ought I to accept my godmother's hospitality? I am not any special expense to her, but it's not a pleasant feeling to be in a house where there are constant difficulties. Think it over, mother. I like being in Paris immensely. But if it were possible, under other circumstances."

Nicoline had observed correctly. The baroness was in pecuniary difficulties. Her jointure was not nearly enough for her way of life. She put aside any idea of retrenchment, and was therein supported by Bertha, who was her most influential adviser in all practical questions. She had saved a sum that was by no means to be despised. If it had been at her disposal it would have permitted her to maintain her course of life for four or five years. But the capital stood as an irredeemable mortgage on a house in Franka, and she could not make up her mind to sell it. Everything got known in Franka. The Grand Duke would know if she took steps to realize money on her mortgage. Then he would know that she was hard pressed, and she did not wish him to know. She sought other ways out of the difficulty.

The Dormans had introduced one of their friends to her, a young journalist named Coppée, who wrote society

notes for the *Vercingetorix*, and witty paragraphs for the *Vie Française*.

"Named Coppée," is scarcely a correct statement. His real name was Koppel, and he was the son of a German teacher cast adrift in Paris. He had become a perfect Frenchman, or rather Parisian, and had chosen a *nom de plume* which should conceal his German origin. He pretended that he only understood German imperfectly, and when he permitted himself to make use of that language, as he could not well avoid doing at first when talking to Nicoline, he murdered it in so incredible a fashion that doubt of his genuineness was increased.

He was an elegant young man, with an eyeglass always in the regulation place, always dressed in the fashion of to-morrow, à precursor in all things great and small, with relations in all societies that set a value on advertisement, and possessed of that invincible self-confidence which old-fashioned people called impudence. He was an easy talker, as fluent with the tongue as with the pen, ever pouring out amusing, but never kindly, stories which he had heard or at need invented, about the persons who played a part in the comedy of the state and of society. He was a mocking connoisseur to whom nothing came amiss, *a blasé*, smiling scoffer at the world and its inhabitants, whose motto appeared to be "Vanity of vanities," and withal a snob who boasted of his turf acquaintances like a travelling courier, and who paid the most servile attention for months to a Colonial Office secretary so as to get the dragon order of Anam.

The baroness singled him out more than her other guests, for he was one of the very few who asked nothing of her, but, on the contrary, did her small services. He wrote about her, her receptions and her guests, in the tone that flattered her secret desires, and she was the more grateful to him because he guessed without need of a word from her what she would like. He esteemed it sufficient reward for his favours to be seen in the baroness's box, and to be allowed to pilot Siegfried behind the scenes, to the fencing-school, or the picture exhibitions. It was his gnawing ambition to be a real live prince's

attaché. But while waiting for the great day that should bestow that office on him, he was content to shine along with his highness in sight of his acquaintances of both sexes. He understood Siegfried's position exactly, but he was also quite aware that Siegfried was far more genuine than most of the princes with whom he had hitherto associated.

One day at dinner, Coppée, according to his custom, poured forth a never-ending flow of anecdotes; among them was one of a well-known member of several clubs who had made about a million on the Stock Exchange in the last fortnight by successful speculation in gold-mines. The baroness became exceedingly thoughtful, and after dinner in the drawing-room, beckoned the young man to her, and began a whispered conversation with him, while the Dormans, Count Laporte, and an actor formed a circle in the opposite corner round Siegfried and Nicoline.

She wanted details about the successful speculator and his millions, and how he had managed to enter the pleasant kingdom of mammon. Coppée was one of the initiated. He told her it was now the fashion to speculate in gold-mines; everybody did it. At midday the smartest people were to be seen at the gates of the Stock Exchange; even ladies of the best society did business from their carriages, and a dozen names well known in the clubs could be mentioned, the bearers of which had lately made fortunes in that way.

"You make one's mouth water," murmured the baroness. She took pains to make her voice sound in a half-joking fashion. "Couldn't I manage to do something of the kind?"

"Nothing is simpler, your highness," replied Coppée. "You give a commission—one, two, or three—and the thing is done."

"A commission! Yes. But to whom—how—where?" said the baroness.

"To a stockbroker," returned Coppée, "how and when and where you please."

"Do you know one, my dear Coppée?"

"Half a dozen, your highness, and one is only cleverer than the other."

Notwithstanding her pains to seem indifferent, and above such transactions, the baroness's growing excitement became more apparent every moment.

"I wonder," she observed, "that any one should work, since it's so easy and simple to get rich."

"I beg your pardon, your highness, it's not quite so easy and simple. You must have a connection, credit, decision, means of obtaining news and of knowing how to take advantage of it at the right moment. He who delays, is lost. So that speculation is a dangerous game for any one who does not belong to the inner circle of the privileged."

"And do you join in the game?" asked the baroness.

"I join in every game, your highness," replied Coppée, with a self-satisfied smile. "That is part of my profession."

The baroness hesitated a moment. Then, as if she could not restrain herself, she exclaimed—

"Then you must also be a millionaire, my dear friend."

He pretended to be modest. "Oh, a million; that's rather a big sum."

She looked at him with secret respect, almost admiration, and again fell into thought. A struggle was going on within her. But it did not last long.

"Tell me, my dear friend," she said decisively, "since you know so many stockbrokers, couldn't you introduce such a miracle-worker to me?"

"Of course, your highness, with the greatest pleasure. When shall I do it?"

"As it is always best to seize the opportunity, it had better be without delay," answered the baroness. "Bring the gentleman with you to-morrow afternoon. Is that convenient to you?"

"I am always at your service, your highness."

Coppée was punctual. He came with his miracle-worker the next afternoon, during the hours in which the baroness received. He had not been quite above board. He was not a stockbroker, but a *remisier*, a common

tout. He was a little, fair, bald Berliner, and in spite of his calling, somewhat shy, and quite dazzled by a highness. He was so confused when he was introduced to her that he almost sat on the floor instead of on the chair she placed for him; his voice trembled, and he uttered some meaningless absurdities before he recovered his presence of mind.

The baroness was greatly pleased with the impression she made on the stockbroker, and was exceedingly polite to him. She graciously inquired about his private circumstances, where he originally came from, how long he had been in Paris, whether he was naturalized; then she abruptly turned the conversation to the Stock Exchange, and asked for information about the conditions and methods of speculation. After Posner—that was the little man's name—had made a few vague remarks, she came to the point without further beating about the bush.

"Our mutual friend," she began, "has enticed me to try my luck on the Stock Exchange."

Posner bowed eagerly.

"What do you think of gold-mines?" asked the baroness.

"Generally speaking, your highness, they have a high reputation. The cream of the best ones has been skimmed, perhaps. But, all the same, I feel sure that the rise is not at an end. With a careful choice there's still something to be made out of them."

"Could you help me in that choice, Herr Posner?"

"It would be a great honour, your highness."

The matter was swiftly settled. The baroness gave an order of such magnificence, that Posner was startled for a moment; but he offered no objection. He only asked that the order should be set down in writing. He said nothing about taking it up. When he left, the baroness gave him her big fat hand to kiss, and asked him to look in again often. Posner could not thank Coppée enough for the opportunity of making so distinguished an acquaintance, and the baroness, after telling Bertha of the transaction with Posner, said—

"How people exaggerate when they speak so ill of the Jews! There are very nice people among them."

The early days of the new acquaintance were charming. Posner bragged about his secret relations with crowned heads on the Stock Exchange till he became a laughing-stock. He was asked, with feigned anxiety, whether there was any truth in the rumour that he had been appointed Minister of Finance to a certain great State. Another time he was loudly congratulated on his elevation to the rank of a Count, as they had heard, and such-like chaff. For those paltry disagreeables which Posner bore in manly fashion, he found ample reward in the baroness's homage. She sent him three or four express letters a day, full of questions, inquiries, recommendations, and proposals which generally required that he should call on her shortly before the dinner hour, in order to give her a verbal report of business on the Stock Exchange. He was often invited to stay for dinner.

When, after the first monthly settlement, he laid a goodly bundle of thousand-franc bonds at the baroness's feet as the result of the operations, she was so delighted that she invited his wife to dinner. Posner had reached the zenith of happiness, and it did not in the least disturb him, in fact, he did not observe it, that, except the inmates of the house, only Coppée took part in the dinner, and that Siegfried did not address a single remark, either to him or to his wife, during the whole evening.

A striking change took place in the baroness. As depressed and melancholy as she had been before, so was she now hopeful and animated. She paid a part of her debt to the jeweller, and gave fresh orders, for it was December, and she wished to give her whole circle valuable gifts, Nicoline and the faithful Bertha included, who, seeing the improved state of things in the house, postponed her plans of leaving. The baroness's spirit of enterprise so increased that Posner, in spite of his devotion and servility, ventured to warn her, but without success. Since Prince Albrecht's death, she had paid her brother his small allowance unpunctually and incompletely; she now made up all arrears, and wrote that in future he

would receive his allowance regularly every quarter. She invited her Vienna lawyer to come to Paris at her expense, in order to discuss plans of campaign against the Grand Ducal family.

Doctor Wolf von Osterburg came. The baroness asked him to stay with her, but he declined. He was a bland, good-looking man of forty, with a handsome black beard, of which he was very proud, prodigal of smiles, extravagant in bows, deliberate in speech, conciliatory on the whole, when there was nothing to annoy him, but with an unsteady, furtive look, which did not willingly let itself be surprised by another eye. The baroness had unbounded confidence in this legal friend. Bertha felt the same, for he was specially pleasant to her, and his beard enchanted her. Nicoline who was insensible to such vulgar influences, felt strongly distrustful of him, and could not restrain herself from warning Siegfried.

"I don't like the man at all. I think you ought to advise your mother to be prudent."

"My mother won't be advised," he said; "at least, by me. I think, however, you do him wrong. He has looked after our business for many years, and was devoted to my father."

She let the subject drop, but was not convinced.

In the first business talk with the baroness, Doctor von Osterburg made only a few general remarks. The duke was not well affected towards her. He would undoubtedly have stopped her allowance altogether if he had not had some consideration for Prince Siegfried. According to legal testimony, she was the Princess von Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level, and Prince Siegfried was heir to his father's name and title. The Franka-Level branch of the house was Austrian, Prince Albrecht was an Austrian, and the Austrian law did not recognize morganatic marriages; but relations of the native reigning house stood under a special family law. The law of the Meissen branch held good in the Grand Duchy, apparently also in the German Empire, and there the legal recognition of their rights would never be obtained. The difference in birth would be an invincible obstacle, that could only be overcome by favour

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of the Grand Duke Hilarius. But in Austria the Meissen family law had no legal power. An action was by no means hopeless. The heir might certainly claim the Level entail, leaving aside, of course, the question of the Loewenstein-Franka accession. But Prince Siegfried, who had apparently lost his rights of naturalization in Vienna, must again become a member of the Austrian Empire. The simplest way would be for him to settle in Vienna. The favour of the monarch could do much, indeed everything, and so far as he knew, the princess could count on kindness in the highest quarter. But then——"

"But then?" asked the baroness, in the greatest suspense.

Osterburg hesitated. "The family is powerful—the struggle will be unequal—the lawsuit will perhaps last for years. It will cost a large sum of money."

"If that's all," exclaimed the baroness, "I see no obstacle."

Osterburg pricked up his ears. "Ah, so much the better; but it is my duty to call your highness's attention to the fact that the first counter-thrust of the family to our attack will be the stopping of the allowance."

"Of course, I reckon on that. But it's of no consequence." The baroness spoke with calm self-confidence.

Osterburg became more attentive. "H'm! Yes. That would be a good beginning. The first point would be won if the family saw they could not starve us out. It is then only a question for how long we are provided——"

"There's no limit," declared the baroness. "If my own means are exhausted before we have conquered, my numerous friends will put at my disposal all I need, during the struggle for my rights."

Osterburg looked searchingly at her, and waited. But she said nothing more.

"That's very nice. Then we can make the venture. In any case, we have all that's necessary for the attempt. I must, however, ask for a somewhat large advance for the first outlay for stamps for the various documents, for the importance of the action is considerable."

"The duke," she replied, "will certainly pay what is

due to us at New Year, for we shall hardly begin proceedings before that. You can keep the five thousand gulden for the early expenses. That will do for a time, I suppose?"

"Certainly, certainly," the lawyer hastened to reply, and involuntarily rubbed his hands. "If we can move freely, things will take a different aspect. My plan of campaign would be as follows:—We purchase a house in Vienna."

"Is that absolutely necessary?"

"Absolutely, your highness, absolutely. It need not be a palace. A modest piece of real estate, a portion of a house, and we need not pay all the purchase money down. Something in advance will do. The rest can remain."

"But why?" objected the baroness.

"I will explain to your highness. As a purchaser, we will have Prince Siegfried of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level entered in the land register. The authorities will either give effect to the entry or they will refuse it. In the first case an important advantage is gained. We have procured a legal title which forms a very useful basis for the remaining claims. In the other case we must attack the refusal, and so the whole affair is opened up. The family must necessarily take up their position as parties to the lawsuit, we draw them into the action, and it's no longer a little matter of a land register, but of a judicial recognition of your claim to the rank and title of Prince Albrecht, in which is included the recognition of your rights as heir-apparent to the entail.

"Yes, indeed," murmured the baroness, thoughtfully. "That seems to me a clever and practical plan. And—how much will the purchase of the house require?"

"Probably a hundred thousand gulden will be sufficient." The baroness started at the figures, and Osterburg quickly continued, "Oh, the money won't be lost; it's an investment, a splendid investment. And it's not necessary to have it all available, forty or fifty thousand gulden will be sufficient."

"Have you anything actually in view, Dr. Osterburg?"

"Yes—no—that is, I'm thinking of various things. It's a very favourable opportunity. There's a crisis in house property in Vienna just now. We have a capital choice. Your highness may have confidence in me."

"You know that you possess my fullest confidence, Dr. Osterburg." She gave him her hand.

He lifted it eagerly to his lips. "Your highness, I know what risks I run——"

"Risks?"

"Of course. Your highness knows to what circle my clients belong. They will not like my defending your cause. I shall have to expect a general boycott."

"I am sorry," said the baroness; "I do not wish——"

"What does it matter, your highness? I shall take the risk. Business takes the second place with me. I am a man before I am a lawyer. I do it for the sake of Prince Albrecht, for your sake, your highness, for that of Prince Siegfried, who is badly treated and disowned. And also for the cause itself. It is a distinction for me that your highness should place the defence of your rights in my hands. We undertake something of which the consequences may be incalculable. The case may establish a principle of the greatest importance."

The more he talked, the more excited and eager he became.

"Yes, your highness, of the greatest importance. If we win—and we shall win, your highness, we must—we shall destroy the antiquated idea of equality of birth in marriage and the right of inheritance. In our day there can't be two kinds of marriage. A sacrament is a sacrament. The sanctity of marriage must be recognized on all sides. At least the noble, natural defenders of divine and human laws must do nothing that can diminish or destroy the respect for marriage."

"I cannot understand how the family fails to see it," murmured the baroness, who drank in Osterburg's words.

"They do not see it because no one has ever placed the matter before them in the right light. And how is that to be done? They won't read memorials, and they won't

listen to me. In the courts we can speak out, and our adversary must listen. And what we have in hand, your highness, is nothing revolutionary. I may be trusted to know how to respect and honour the necessary and wholesome privileges of reigning houses. No, we are not going to pull down princes from their rightful position. On the contrary. We demand for high-born blood the esteem that is its right. We carry on the most beautiful, the most ancient traditions which have become dimmed in the course of centuries. The old princely right knew nothing of equality of birth. Blood is decisive. Princely virtue dwells in the blood, in the origin. Equality of birth is a later, degrading invention. We'll chase it from the world your highness. You don't realize it perhaps, your highness, but we are on the point of making history."

Osterburg had spoken with such enthusiasm that he had risen from his seat, and had shouted the last sentences with violent gesticulation as if he had been addressing the jury. But the baroness had scarcely followed his loud talking, she had been absorbed in calculation.

"Your enthusiasm is infectious," she said, after a brief pause. "Let me consider a little. Tell me exactly how much money I shall want, when it must be available, and everything. Then we can conclude the necessary business."

Dr. Osterburg was graciously dismissed, and could give himself up to the attractions and sights of Paris. The baroness had a long consultation with Bertha, who listened in silence, according to her custom, until her mistress had finished, and then observed—

"There's a good deal in what Dr. Osterburg says. Yes. And the purchase of a house in Vienna pleases me much. But where's the money to come from?"

"Why, little Posner! He comes in there."

"Yes, but is he to be relied on?" asked Bertha.

"Of course."

"For thirty thousand gulden? And for all that is needed for expenses so long as the allowance is not forthcoming?"

"That depends," replied the baroness, "on what sort

of business we do. If it's good, then we shall have more, if not, then naturally less."

"I do not understand that. Your highness knows best. If there's no anxiety about money, then let Dr. Osterburg, in God's name, proceed with the action. I think that's the best course we can take," said Bertha.

Bertha's agreement set the baroness's mind fully at rest, and made her come quickly to a decision. She gave Osterburg the necessary powers, signed the requisite powers of attorney, promised to send him the needful funds before the middle of January, and during the week he spent in Paris, she wore a proud, self-satisfied air that had not appeared in her for a long time. Osterburg was invited to dinner every day; he was taken each evening to a theatre, a circus, or an artists' *café*; once a large evening party was given in his honour, to which her whole circle was invited, ladies, too, whom Nicoline had not yet seen. When at length Osterburg departed, he was enriched with the baroness's gift of a valuable breast-pin, "since you won't stay till Christmas," she said, "will you accept this trifling gift now?" He left with assurances of his devotion, and with the promise to lead her to decisive victory.

Following her usual custom, she deemed it unnecessary to inform Siegfried of her plans. But he learned them in the usual way from Frau Büchler, to whom Bertha had made certain communications. He felt humiliated that his mother should always act without consulting him, but the plan pleased him greatly, and he did not spend much thought on how the means for its execution was procured.

He employed the first occasion on which he was alone with Nicoline to tell her.

"Now, my dear Nicoline, our cause will take its course. Osterburg seems to be a splendid legal strategist. He has laid a plan of campaign full of good augury before us. I am to buy a house in Vienna, and so regain my position as a native of Austria. As an owner of house property I shall be entered in the land register by my father's name and title. My uncle is sure to oppose it. We shall commence an action against him, and in that way dispute our

rights, at least in Austria, where morganatic marriages have no legal recognition. What do you think of it, Nicoline?"

She remained thoughtful and silent.

"Well," he said, "don't you like the plan?"

"I don't know," she said at last; "it's not exactly what I should wish. And possibly the Grand Duke Hilarius will not recognize an Austrian verdict."

"Of course he won't," replied Siegfried.

"Then you won't have got much farther," said Nicoline.

"I say of course he won't," returned Siegfried, "I mean: not at once. If I am legally Prince Loewenstein in my own home, according to the general view, I am so everywhere, except in Loewenstein-Franka. I can put up with that. In time even Franka will think differently. But tell me what would be a better course of action in your opinion?"

"I have no opinion," she replied thoughtfully. "I picture a struggle differently; not in the form of house purchasing and land registers. But that is of course childish. Probably it's the best method of proceeding, at least as a beginning."

Siegfried tried to be with Nicoline as much as he could. Except by crafty planning this was only possible at meals, and then the presence of the parasites, ordinary and extraordinary, excluded all confidential talk. The late autumn weather did not often permit of walking in the garden. On days when the paths were dry and the sun shone, Nicoline, when she came back from her singing lesson, liked to spend the intervening time before lunch walking up and down between the flower-beds and the hedges. Siegfried invariably joined her. It was a subject of observation and talk among the servants how absorbed they seemed to be in each other at those times.

Once during Osterburg's visit Siegfried had so arranged matters that he had not accompanied his mother to the theatre. Nicoline, also, had remained at home, and, as usual, wrote to her mother. Siegfried hoped she would come down to the drawing-room, for she must have heard

him come home after dining at the restaurant. But she stayed in her room. Siegfried waited impatiently for half an hour, then he summoned his old nurse Frau Büchler from the kitchen and sent her to ask Nicoline to come to the drawing-room, if she was not too busy.

She came directly. "Do you want anything, Prince Siegfried?"

"Only to have a chat with you, Nicoline."

"Really! Your lordship commands me to be at your service." She said it jestingly, yet with a slight tone of annoyance.

"Why do you laugh at me, Nicoline? It's not nice of you. I haven't seen you since lunch, and have hardly spoken to you for three days. I find it too long. I wish you did too."

Nicoline hesitated on the threshold, pen in hand.

"Put that stupid pen aside, and sit down. Have you really so much writing to do?"

"Yes; but it's not work, it's pleasure," replied Nicoline, sitting down in a chair near the stove, and placing her penholder by the side of the handsome Meissen china clock. "I write to my mother every day, and, if possible, a long letter. I feel the need of speaking out. And I've no one here to whom I can do that. I am too much alone. And I'm not used to that."

"Alone, why you're here as with your own family. You're surrounded with friends in the house. And you must have dozens of companions of your own age, comrades, if I may say so, at Signora Conti's," exclaimed Siegfried.

"I beg your pardon," returned Nicoline. "They are by no means companions of my own age. I am by far the youngest in the class, and there are four and twenty of us. And they're not comrades either. I do not know if it's my fault or theirs, but after more than two months I've not found the right friend. Perhaps its because of the difference in language. The young ladies are mostly American or English. I don't know any English. And their French is almost as poor as mine."

"But you speak quite fluently," Siegfried assured her.

"It's just beginning to go better. And that has had its effect. Besides, my fellow-pupils are so full of their future fame. Each considers herself a star of the first magnitude, and is consequently jealous of all the others, and fears or hates possible rivals in them. How can there be any confidence between us? I sometimes picture to myself all our futures, and then I am merry and sad at once. Some of them have quite nice voices, others not. They all fail in actual perfection. I judge them by my mother," said Nicoline.

"That's rather a high standard," suggested Siegfried.

"True, but it's the one I am accustomed to. And then I think to myself: most of them will wisely give up singing, and vanish among the pots and pans of domestic life. I shall meet others again on my tours as chorus singers, and then I ask myself whether it will show better feeling to recognize them or not to recognize them?"

"And you have no doubt about your own tours?" asked Siegfried, with a smile.

"Why should I have?" returned Nicoline, with surprise.

"You are right, there is no need. But it might happen —there might be some one who would not care to see you a prima donna."

She blushed. "Are you sure that I should heed such a wish?"

He did not reply. He did not wish to pursue the thought farther.

"I must become a prima donna," she said, "I do not see how I can otherwise gain the crown to which I am destined."

"Will it be a prince, who shall place the crown on your fair hair?" said Siegfried, softly.

"Certainly," she returned quickly; "a little morganatic crown with false pearls and a coat of arms with a motto: 'Humble yourself, my dear.'"

He avoided her glance, and looked somewhat absently at the full length portraits of Prince Albrecht and Prince Ditmar in gilt frames, with the Meissen arms and the ducal crown which hung on either side of the fire-place.

An expressive pause followed, broken by Siegfried, with the irrelevant remark—

"I am sorry we do not satisfy you. I should so like to see you contented and happy."

"Thank you, Prince Siegfried, you are very kind. I want nothing here but a friend. It is perhaps ungrateful that I should feel such a need. I am as well taken care of here as I could possibly be. It is quite natural that my aunt should not bother about me. She has other cares, and cannot, of course, spend her time talking to me. I have been spoilt in that respect."

"Only in that respect?" asked Siegfried, smiling.

"You are right," she said. "My mother is an angel. She sympathizes with my every heart-beat. She follows all my thoughts as far as I wish it. She has kept marvellously young, and thoroughly understands a girl's heart! And now, when I can't discuss everything with her, I must anyway write her everything."

"I'd give something," said Siegfried, "to look over your shoulder."

"It wouldn't interest you," she returned. "I just put down whatever comes into my head, any sort of nonsense, with which one's mother has patience."

"But let me, Nicoline."

"What? let you read my letters?"

He nodded.

"That's an original idea," said Nicoline. "Why do you want to read them?"

"To see what you say about me," replied Siegfried.

"Oh, indeed! Are you sure that I say anything about you?" mocked Nicoline.

"Yes, Nicoline," he said simply, and looked at her.

She lowered her eyes. "How conceited men are!"

"Nicoline, I know that you never tell an untruth. Can you assure me that you never say anything about me to your mother."

"I refuse to make a declaration," she said.

"That's a confession," he replied quickly. "Now take back at once what you said about conceit."

She raised her head. "I don't send my mother

poems. Of course I tell her what I see, what I experience, what surrounds me. I've often told her of Nero and Bella."

"Thank you," interrupted Siegfried, with a smile.

"Don't you like that? If you only knew how much I am in love with Nero," she continued.

"Then I envy Nero," said Siegfried, softly.

She was silent, and remained for a short space sunk in thought, then reached her penholder and got up.

"Good night, Prince Siegfried. You know that the night before a singing lesson I mustn't go to bed late."

"You're going to leave me alone so soon! How unkind!"

He grasped her hand and kissed it. She drew it away quickly and hurried out of the room.

He had got up as if to hold her back. He sat down again and stared into the fire, which was nearly out. He could not conceal from himself that he had made her an absolute declaration. Superficially he regretted it, if it made their relations difficult. In the depth of his semi-consciousness he was glad. For he had felt impelled to tell her that she was not indifferent to him. His thoughts took him far away from the reality, and he was only recalled to the present by Nero's violent antics, who made his greetings in his usual stormy fashion. Siegfried got up at once and hastened to his room. He wished to avoid his mother.

When the baroness entered the room with Bertha, she could tell by the smell of the cigarette smoke that Siegfried had just left it, and she felt surprised and hurt that he had not waited a minute to bid her good night.

"He's not a bit affectionate," she could not help complaining to Bertha, who did not feel called upon to defend him.

The next morning after obtaining the information from Frau Büchler, she told her mistress that Siegfried and Nicoline had spent the whole evening alone together in the drawing-room. At the moment the baroness had no time to pay heed to the matter. Final discussions with

Dr. Osterburg filled the whole of the short winter's day, and on the morrow the lawyer took his departure. Then she turned her attention to Siegfried and Nicoline.

"I believe they're flirting with each other, and I don't like it," said the baroness.

"Neither do I, your highness."

"Perhaps it wasn't wise of me to have Nicoline here."

"That's possible, your highness."

"What's to be done?"

"Does your highness think it's very dangerous?"

"As soon as my back is turned," said the baroness, "they get together. That's very suspicious. Nicoline has not had a good example before her at home, and is by no means an ignorant baby. And I don't put much trust in Siegfried, since he's been under the Dormans' tuition. I'm responsible to Prince Johann, and also to Frau Flammert."

"Perhaps they've got a slight fancy for each other, but that'll pass," suggested Bertha.

"When it's too late."

"Maybe your highness can warn the prince."

"Wouldn't it be better to speak to Nicoline?"

Bertha was silent.

"I'm only anxious to protect Nicoline, not Siegfried," said her mistress.

"It might vex her. And it's not her fault," said Bertha.

"Oh, there's some coquetry in it. But you are right. I'll speak to Siegfried at once.

When Nicoline had gone to her singing lesson, the baroness sent for Siegfried to her boudoir, and for the first time told him of the arrangements she had made with Osterburg. Siegfried listened in silence, and was careful not to betray the fact that it was no news to him. His apparent indifference annoyed her.

"You sit there like a post and don't stir. And I'm simply wearing myself out for you."

"It's your own fault, mamma. You do everything alone, and only tell me when the deed's done. What else can I do except listen and hold my tongue?" said Siegfried.

"That's the most comfortable way. But you're old enough to be my coadjutor," observed his mother.

"That's just what I wish. But you have not done me the honour of inviting me to share your labours," replied Siegfried.

"Because you seem so dull and indifferent," said the baroness. "For instance, you haven't asked me where I'm going to get the money from to pay for the house and the lawsuit that is probably in front of us."

"You've never told me anything about our pecuniary position. How am I to know whether you've got the money or not?" asked Siegfried.

"Well, it happens that I have got it. But I'm making a great sacrifice. I'm spending my last drop of blood in order to attain our end. We shall, I hope, win our suit, but we shall be Prince and Princess Without-a-Penny."

"But our allowance remains," said Siegfried.

"We can't count on it. You know the duke," said his mother.

"Can't we compel him to pay it?"

"How are we to do that? By holding a pistol to his head?"

"By legal proceedings."

"The duke has no duties to us, legally."

Siegfried shrugged his shoulders and said nothing.

"I must count on you, then," said the baroness.

"On me?" he asked, surprised.

"I lift you into the saddle. It's you who have to ride. I win a position for you in the family. You must provide the means to live up to your rank by a suitable alliance," she said.

He looked up gloomily, and changed colour.

"You understand me?" asked the baroness.

"Yes," he replied shortly.

"Now you know what I expect of you. You know the part allotted to you in the campaign. So you must arrange accordingly. Amuse yourself in the way congenial to your rank and age. But don't hang a chain about your neck, and, above all, no scandal! You

must keep yourself free and give no cause for gossip. That would spoil your prospects," said the baroness.

Siegfried said nothing. The baroness grew impatient. She hoped he would ask her why she spoke like that. It would have made her task easier.

"I say all this because I think I have noticed something lately. I should be the last person to interfere with your pleasure when it is harmless, as you know. But you must leave Nicoline alone," said the baroness.

Siegfried started as if he had been bitten by an adder.

"Mamma, whatever do you mean?"

"Don't be so sly, you humbug. We see clearly that you're greatly attracted to her. But you musn't flirt with her. I'll have no scandal in my house," continued his mother.

"Mamma," cried Siegfried, "what do you take Nicoline for? What do you take me for?"

"For two attractive young people, whom their elders must warn to be on their guard," returned the baroness.

He struggled with himself for a moment, and then said—

"You do us wrong. Nicoline is very proud, and would know how to take care of herself under all circumstances. And you may rely on me to know the respect due to a girl who is under our protection."

"All the better, my son, all the better," she said. "It was my duty to draw your attention to the matter. It's better to shut the stable door before the horse has escaped. So no clandestine meetings, and no long *tête-à-tête* evenings."

Siegfried felt it his pressing duty to take Nicoline under his protection.

"I don't know what gossip has been carried to you, mamma," he said, "but it's all supposition—hateful supposition. We live in the same house. We take our meals together. We talk together. That's natural enough, and we don't think anything of it. It's an insult to Nicoline if any one thinks otherwise."

"You defend her with such zeal and warmth——"

"That's a matter of course, considering my friendship for her."

"Indeed?"

"Certainly. I think any one would be her friend who knows her character and intelligence. Aren't you fond of her, mamma?"

The baroness looked at him searchingly. "Siegfried, you're not frank with me. Things seem to have gone further than I feared. You talk like a man in love."

"And if I were?" he exclaimed angrily.

"Then, my son," replied the baroness, with studied gentleness, "you must bear in mind that Nicoline, although she is destined to go on the stage, is not one of your little friends behind the scenes."

"I know that; and if I was in love with her, I should marry her," replied Siegfried.

"You've even thought of that. Well, my dear, let me tell you that it's a very mad thought. You talk like a shopman at the Bon Marché. You forget who you are. Princes are not privileged to marry according to their inclinations, if the inclination does not coincide with the interests of their house." She had not the least idea how grotesque such a speech sounded in her mouth. She really thought of herself as of a noble ancestress who was defending the prestige of her crown against her offspring's amorous aberrations. "If you marry a little singer——"

"Or a great one," interrupted Siegfried.

"Or a great one, you will end everything. Your life will be over. You've nothing to expect from the future. It would be moral suicide, and I don't think you'll commit it."

Siegfried got up. "Have you anything more to say to me, mamma?"

"No."

He kissed her hand and left the room. The baroness rang for Bertha.

"It's worse than I imagined," she told her, and repeated the conversation. She concluded her account with, "Nicoline must go."

Bertha agreed. "Yes, your highness, that's the wisest course."

But how was it to be worked? It was a ticklish job. There was nothing of which to accuse Nicoline, and she could not be suddenly turned out. It was equally impossible to ask her mother to send for her home. For the baroness had asked her of her own free will to let Nicoline go to her when she heard that Frau Flammert intended to send her daughter to Paris to study under Signora Conti. Any such change of mind must have a sufficient reason, and how was one to be given to the mother?

As usual, Bertha had an idea. She devised a plan to which, after some hesitation and reflection, the baroness assented. The guests at luncheon included Count Laporte, Saint-Denis, the actor, and an American lady and her daughter, who lived in great style, whose husband, so Coppée said, possessed silver mines in Idaho. When they had gone, and Nicoline was about to go to her room, the baroness said—

"Wait a minute, Nicoline, I want to speak to you."

Somewhat surprised, Nicoline stopped in the middle of the room, and, at a sign from her hostess, sat down near her. The baroness sent Siegfried and Bertha away, and said to Nicoline, whose curiosity was aroused by these preliminaries—

"What have you decided to do for Christmas, my dear?"

"Must I decide anything?" asked Nicoline, surprised.

"I thought you would wish to spend the holidays with your mother," said the baroness.

"I should like it very much. But mamma hasn't said anything about it, and I can hardly now pay a flying visit to Diesa. Signora Conti only gives us two days' holiday, and I do not want to miss any of my lessons," answered Nicoline.

The baroness let her have her say. Then she observed—

"It's a pity; if you had gone home, there would have been no difficulty. I must tell you that the doctor has ordered me south. You know how unwell I am, and all

these excitements make me so much worse. I have decided to go to Nice in a few days."

A pause ensued, which Nicoline broke by exclaiming softly—

"Oh!"

"Yes, my dear. Siegfried and the servants will, of course, go with me. I am puzzled what to do about you."

"There is no need, aunt," said Nicoline. She grew very red, and looked down.

"But there would be no purpose in taking you. What would you do at Nice? And I can't leave you here alone in the house. I am very sorry, but I see nothing else for you than to go home," said the baroness.

"I beg your pardon, aunt, but I can't do that in any case," replied Nicoline.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the baroness, who was beginning to get excited. "Your mother trusted you to me——"

"By your desire, aunt."

"Certainly. But if the doctor sends me south for my health, I can't stay in Paris on your account," said the baroness.

"But, aunt, whatever makes you imagine that I should ask such a thing of you?" rejoined Nicoline.

"If I'm not in Paris, how can you remain there?" objected the baroness.

"I should have come to Paris without your kind invitation. Mamma is convinced that I need Signora Conti's teaching, and I agree with her. If I can't live with you, I must go to a boarding-house. How do my fellow-pupils manage?" said Nicoline.

"Ah, you'd like to run about Paris all alone," exclaimed the baroness, in a loud voice.

"Run about Paris? But, aunt——"

"You talk like an irresponsible child. I received you from your mother's hands, I must return you to her. Thus I free myself from any responsibility. If your mother likes to send you back to Paris alone, she can reconcile it with her own conscience. But I doubt if she

will do it. Meanwhile, you must go back to your mother," said the baroness.

Nicoline was silent, but her lips were shut firmly, and her intrepid blue eyes sparkled angrily.

"And when will you start?" asked her aunt.

"I see no reason for it," replied Nicoline.

"Then I shall write to your mother and ask her to send for you home," said the baroness.

"I shall write to my mother and ask her to leave me here," retorted Nicoline.

"I do not wish you to remain in Paris," shouted the baroness.

The more excited she became, the calmer Nicoline remained.

"I beg your pardon, aunt, you can turn me out of your house——"

"I have not turned you out of my house. Don't, please, twist my words. I have told you that I must shut up my house for a time."

"Very well, aunt, you shut up your house, and I'll get on by myself as well as I can."

"That's pure madness. Be sensible, Nicoline; I speak in your interest."

"I thank you sincerely; but my mind is made up. And please leave me to attend to my own interests. I can do it all right, I assure you. I shall do like the Americans who live here alone and study."

The baroness's large fat hand clutched the arm of her chair, and the veins on her forehead swelled visibly.

"Nicoline, you're an obstinate girl. You're not to be convinced. But take care. I can settle other people, and I shall settle you. You shall go home——"

"Don't get so excited, aunt. I am very sorry to vex you so much. Forgive me. I thank you over and over again for all the kindness you've shown me, and I won't be a burden to you any longer."

Nicoline got up and moved as if to take the baroness's hand. She drew it hastily back, and got purple.

"I forbid you to remain in Paris," she shouted.

"Forbid?" answered Nicoline, drawing herself up. "I don't see how you can do that."

"You shall see. I shall go to Signora Conti, and I know how to arrange so that she won't keep you," said the angry woman.

"Ah! you'll do that? I begin to see that it's not on my account you want me out of Paris, but on yours. But I've no idea why," said Nicoline.

"You don't know why? Well, I'll enlighten your ignorance." She was madly angry, and had no longer any control over her words. "You can't pretend with me. I see through you. You're trying to catch Siegfried——"

Nicoline uttered a low cry and turned deathly pale. The baroness raged on, "But you won't succeed. I've a word to say in that. You're playing the game of the Grand Duke Hilarius. That's quite the form of the old intriguer. You're a little too ambitious, my dear; put that notion out of your head."

Tears rose to Nicoline's eyes, but she made an immense effort to control herself. She passed her hand quickly over her wet eyes, and said in a low, tremulous voice, "You abuse your rights as mistress of the house, baroness——"

She could not get farther. The baroness rose quickly, but staggered back into her chair, and shouted—

"Bertha! Bertha!"

The maid came rushing upstairs while the baroness gasped—

"You impertinent creature, don't forget who you are and who I am!"

"Certainly not, baroness. If we each remember our origin, you know which of us deserves to be respected by the other."

Bertha had opened the door, and, open-mouthed, had heard the end of the conversation.

"My drops! my heart!" muttered the baroness, with husky voice, and fell over in a heap in her chair.

The maid hurried to her mistress's assistance, and Nicoline left the room.

When she reached her own room, she cowered down

in a corner of the sofa. Her strength was exhausted, and she broke out into bitter sobbing. But it did not last long. Pride soon took possession of her again, and gave her self-control. She began to write to her mother. But her hand shook, and she threw the pen down. Her mother should not perceive any excitement in the letter. First she would do her packing. She had only her hand-bag in her room. That would not be of any use. Her large trunk had been taken away. She must ask one of the servants for it. But how? Go down and ask Janusz or the coachman? That was too humiliating. Ring the bell? But if no one came? If no one took any heed of her? If they showed her that she could no longer give orders here? That would be more humiliating still. So she hesitated, filled with bitterness. But not for long! She was not going to be timid? Not at all! She would leave the house in which she had been so cruelly insulted, but as a lady. For she was a lady, and all these people, the poor frantic baroness included, should treat her as a lady. With a steady hand she pressed the button of the electric bell, and held it down longer than usual, so that it sounded loud and commanding in the servants' part of the house. Janusz hurried upstairs and almost tore open the door.

"Fetch my large travelling trunk," she ordered calmly and loudly without letting him enter.

He stared at her in amazement.

"Did you not understand me? I want my trunk here."

"Very well, very well," he answered quickly. "Where is it?"

"I do not know. You must inquire. But be quick."

Janusz went down and sought Bertha in order to inform her of the young lady's extraordinary request. Bertha was occupied with the baroness, who was gradually recovering from her excitement, and was preparing to go up to her boudoir supported by her maid's arm. Bertha repeated to her mistress what the servant had whispered to her.

"Take her her trunk, Janusz," ordered the baroness,

in a weak voice; and turning to Bertha as soon as Janusz had gone, added, "Let her get out of my sight; the sooner, the better."

"But where can she go, your highness?" asked Bertha.

"That's not my business. We have only to wire to her mother that she's left us. We need not fear. Weeds come to no harm."

Meanwhile Nicoline waited impatiently for her trunk. She was anxious to get away from a house where a hostile atmosphere surrounded her. Her thoughts turned to Siegfried. At first with resentful anger. Trying to catch him? What a base accusation! What could the baroness imagine? Was she an old maid who wanted a husband at any price? What was there in Siegfried that she should wish to run after him? She was certain that men very different from him would be at her feet as soon as she made her *début*. Then a question occurred to her and rather hurt her. Had he any share in the silly old woman's outbreak which now began to appear more absurd than insulting, probably, too, intended to serve the crooked intrigues of the Grand Duke of Loewenstein? Had he bragged like a coxcomb? Or let fall an imprudent remark? Did he think that she had any intentions towards him? If he did! That was too horrible. But it could not be. Siegfried was disturbed by her presence. She saw that plainly enough. Indeed she must have been blind not to see it. He sought her much more than she sought him. She had never said or done anything that could give him the least encouragement—and that he should invent something hateful—he was not so mean as that. How ought she to have treated Siegfried? She had been unsuspicious of her companions in the house. He was indifferent to her.

Was he so really? For the first time she considered the question, shyly, gently, and although she was alone, she blushed. No, he was not altogether indifferent to her. She liked to talk to him. He was very good-looking. His fate closely resembled hers. He did not impress her intellectually. But what man did? They all felt

themselves so superior, Siegfried like the others. She gave him a sort of sisterly, almost motherly, sympathy. Try to catch him! Fie! fie! If he was seriously in love with her? If he proposed to her? No. Impossible. Marry him! That wouldn't do. She only wished to be his friend —the good, true friend whom he had never had—whom he needed—they were both of the same family—they both had to complain similarly of their near relatives, and of the decrees of society—it seemed to her that their fates were mysteriously knitted together—that she must help him—she did not know how—but marry him? No. She had not that kind of feeling for him. She did not want to marry at all. Why should she? To be the slave of a vain, selfish idiot? She wanted to be free, free, and the architect of her own fortune. Her father denied her the name that was hers by natural laws. It was a proud name. She would accept no lower one. Such a name, or her own that she herself would lift high. Poor Siegfried could not help her to that, he could only hinder her. If he was really in love with her, and told her so, she would press his hand warmly and heartily, and reply, "No, friend Siegfried, no. We will like each other very, very much, but our paths in life are narrow. We must follow them alone. There's not room for two." She spoke the last words unconsciously, half aloud, tears rose to her eyes, and she imagined she felt Siegfried's hand in hers.

A knock at the door woke her from her dream.

"Come in."

Janusz dragged in the big trunk, and at a sign from Bertha, who accompanied him, went.

"You wish to leave us, Fräulein Nicoline?"

"No."

"But the trunk, Fräulein?"

"Don't pretend, Bertha. I am leaving the house."

"I know that, Fräulein. But where are you going?"

"That's my business."

During this conversation she had already begun to take her things out of the wardrobe and the chest of drawers, and to arrange them in the trunk.

"Can't I help you, Fräulein?"

"No, thank you. I can manage quite well."

"But Fräulein Nicoline, we must know what is going to become of you, where you're staying, if your mamma asks about you."

"You don't suppose that I'm going to run away from my mother? We do not require a go-between."

Bertha said no more, but she remained in the room and looked on. Nicoline took no further notice of her, but proceeded with what she had to do. When the trunk was packed, she asked quietly and firmly—

"Will you ask them to get me a cab?"

"Certainly, at once," answered Bertha, and went away abashed.

Nicoline waited, in hat and coat and with gloved hands, for the announcement that the cab was there. She thought of the effect of her disappearance on Siegfried. Who would tell him what had happened? How would they tell him? How would he take it? Should she write him a word of farewell? Perhaps. Yes. No. It wasn't a farewell. He would certainly seek her out. But how? Where? The scrap of sly romance that ever lurks in a girl's heart—at least, in an artist's heart—awoke. She would vanish, and leave no trace. Siegfried should feel some anxiety. A sleepless night, a restless day. She would be responsible for so much. At bottom, it was his fault that she had to go through this disagreeable adventure. He would find the clue if he employed a little ingenuity. He had only to apply to her mother. But would he venture on such a step? And what would her mother think? Perhaps it would be better to leave her address behind.

Her address! Thoughts of the future flashed through her head for the first time. Hitherto, only the past and the present had filled it. She had no address. Where was she to go? What was she to do? She must go to a boarding-house. That was evidently the only thing she could do; but she knew of none. And how could she look for one with her box on the roof of the cab. That Siegfried should just have gone out! If only he had been at home, she could have asked him to help her.

At last Bertha reappeared, accompanied by Janusz, to carry the trunk downstairs.

"Perhaps Fräulein wishes to bid her highness good-bye——"

"That's unnecessary. The baroness doesn't want to set eyes on me again. I have thanked her for her kindness, but you can do it again, in my name."

"I will do so, Fräulein. Where is the cabman to go?"

Now she must speak out. And for the rest, what was the good of secrecy? They could take the number of the cab, and could thus discover what they wished to know.

"To Signora Conti's," she said.

"Ah!" was all that Bertha said.

To Signora Conti. That was the idea of salvation that Bertha's question had evolved.

She went downstairs. Old Frau Büchler, with a troubled expression on her face, stood in the hall. She did not dare to show her sympathy much because of Bertha, who would at once tell the baroness; but the old dame was really very sorry that Nicoline was going. She had seen more of her in going with her to her singing lessons than any other member of the household, and she had grown very fond of her.

Nicoline held out her hand to her before she could think of anything to say.

"Good-bye, dear Frau Büchler. Don't forget me. I shan't forget you. And remember me most warmly to Siegfried."

Before Nicoline could prevent it, the old woman kissed her hand, and a tear fell on her glove.

Nero, who was disporting himself in the garden, hurried up to Nicoline as she came down the steps, and barking loudly, tried to jump up on her. She stood still, warding off his attentions—for his paws were muddy—stroked him several times, and said softly—

"Good-bye, Nero, good-bye. It's a pity I can't take you with me."

Bertha, like Nero, accompanied Nicoline to the garden-gate, where the cab waited. Janusz held the door open.

As Nicoline got in, she slipped a gold ten-franc piece into the hand of the man, who bowed servilely. She would have liked to tip Bertha also, who stood there curtseying, if only to abash her. But——

But she had no more money, and had necessarily to content herself with nodding to her from the cab.

She cherished a secret hope that she might meet Siegfried while the cab slowly wended its way through the quiet streets of the Cité Dubois. Turning pale, he would see the trunk on the top, bid the driver stop, and she would let her friend get in. But the cab reached the Rue Palestrina, and began to go faster, and there was no sign of Siegfried's tall figure.

Nicoline had no money. Hitherto she had not needed any. The baroness bought her what she wanted for her dress, and also paid three hundred and fifty francs a month in advance to Signora Conti, for the singing-lessons. The baroness settled directly with Frau Flammert for that outlay. For small needs, and so as to have a few shillings in her pocket, Nicoline was allowed twenty francs a month. The tip she had given to Janusz was the last of it.

"Poor as a church mouse!" thought Nicoline, and smiled to herself. The thought did not disturb her in the least. On the contrary, it amused her. She would know what it was like to be in the world without money.

After a while, the cab stopped at Signora Conti's house. Nicoline told the driver to wait, and went in. She found her teacher with a class of about a dozen young ladies, and with her accompanist at the piano.

"Fräulein Flammert," she exclaimed, "what brings you here?"

"May I speak to you for a moment, madame?" asked Nicoline.

"What is it, my child?" said the signora.

"Not here, if you'll be so kind," said Nicoline.

Signora Conti looked annoyed. She did not like to be interrupted during lesson hours. But a glance at Nicoline revealed to her that something unusual had happened, and she took the girl into the next room.

Here Nicoline told her in a few words that she had left the baroness and was homeless.

Signora Conti uttered an exclamation of surprise. 'Why?"

"Because of a delusion on her part," replied Nicoline. "The princess wants to have me out of Paris. I want to stay because my future as a singer lies in your hands.

"But what delusion? I don't understand," said the signora.

"I'll tell you all about it, signora, but don't leave me in the lurch," implored Nicoline.

"Little fool. That goes without saying. Does your mother know?" she returned.

"Not yet. It has all come about so suddenly. An hour ago, I knew nothing of it myself," said Nicoline.

"I've no time now, my dear. Tell me quickly what you want me to do," said the signora.

"Recommend me a boarding-house so that I can drive there at once. I can manage then," said Nicoline.

"Is your cab waiting?"

"Yes, signora."

"Send it away. Stay here quietly until the lesson is over. Then we can discuss the matter in peace," advised Signora Conti.

Nicoline turned very red. "I've no money to pay the cab," she said in much embarrassment.

Signora Conti frowned. "You're madder than my maddest Americans," she murmured. She pressed the electric bell near the stove and gave the servant who answered it an order in a low voice, and returned to the classroom with the small stage at the back.

During thirty years of active work, the celebrated teacher had accustomed herself to refrain from taking any very warm interest in her pupils' private affairs; she had met with too much ingratitude and heartlessness. She was careful to make her intercourse with them entirely professional. But each year there were one or two among her thirty or forty pupils from both hemispheres in whom she took a special interest, because they were unusually talented, and promised to become famous. It was of the greatest

importance for her own reputation that at least one star a year should arise from her classrooms. She became a sort of mother to the girl, and took an interest in her far in excess of her duty. This year Nicoline was the favourite. She had the finest voice, the strongest temperament, real, native dramatic talent, a mother who occupied a foremost place on the stage, in short she was a piece of the future that secretly promised much.

When the pupils who were then at work had finished their scales and tone exercises, and there was a short pause, Signora Conti called up two or three of the young ladies whom she regarded as particularly serious-minded and well-behaved, and asked them about the boarding-houses in which they lived and if there was a vacancy for Fräulein Flammert. They all rejoiced, and each wanted to have Nicoline with her. For, in spite of ordinary jealousy, her comrades felt that there was something unusual in her, and most of them were friendly to her. A pretty, lively American won the day. Her boarding-house was near Signora Conti's, not immoderately expensive, kept by a widow of good family and her two daughters, and she took only a few boarders, and only persons of good standing—so Signora Conti entrusted Nicoline to her. The American was to take her at once and help her to make arrangements with the landlady. Signora Conti had her own carriage got ready, so that she might see that Nicoline was not merely anybody.

"Now, go, my dear, and if you'll come a little earlier to your lesson to-morrow, we will have a talk. Take this until you hear from your mother." And she pressed a twenty-franc piece into the girl's unwilling hand.

When Nicoline found herself in the carriage with her comrade, she was obliged to smile again, and more gladly than before. It was really easier to get on without money than for all her self-confidence she had hoped.

There were no difficulties at the boarding-house. There was a room for her. It was not so pleasant as at the Villa Josephine. The window did not look into a garden, yet a glimpse of bare trees was not wanting so long as it was winter, and with regard to the appointments inside, her

glad youthfulness cared nothing for those. She partially unpacked, threw her gloves, coat, and hat on the bed, and wrote to her mother.

"DEAREST MUMMY,

"Don't be alarmed. I have changed my abode. The baroness has a tile loose. It's impossible to get on with the poor creature. She wanted to send me off to you to-day like a parcel. I naturally could not agree to such a piece of folly, so I have left her to her delusions, and come to this boarding-house which was recommended by Signora Conti. I am very sorry to put you to more expense, but I know, my only mother, that you won't mind, since it's for me. And it is better so. I have often wondered, in my own heart, how you came to accept such a favour from the baroness. I do not want to be indebted to her for a material service. It was very uncomfortable in her house. Nothing was in harmony. I only regret Nero. I shall miss him. A thousand kisses from your

"NICO."

She was not quite honest. Nero was not the only thing she regretted.

BOOK III

SIEGFRIED had spent the afternoon at a dress rehearsal at one of the Boulevard theatres; he had been vastly bored, had gone afterwards to his shooting-gallery, had placed a dozen bullets with his usual skill, and, much pleased with himself, went home in time to dress for dinner. He found Coppée and Posner in the drawing-room, and vouchsafed them a curt greeting. Inquiring for his mother, Janusz informed him that she had not been out that afternoon, and was now dressing. He went to his room, accompanied by Janusz, who gave him a helping hand. He performed his task in silence, for he considered it superfluous to tell his young master what had happened in his absence.

Siegfried was ready in a quarter of an hour. Passing Nicoline's door on his way down, he knocked and called out cheerfully—

"Are you ready, Nicoline?"

Now Janusz thought it time to open his mouth.

"Fräulein Nicoline is not there, your highness."

"Is she down already?" asked Siegfried.

"No, your highness; Fräulein Nicoline has gone away."

"Gone away? To dinner?"

"Away from the house, your highness, with her things."

Siegfried opened his eyes wide, and looked at the servant's cunning, smooth face with the greatest astonishment. His habitual self-control helped him to restrain his movements. Without a word he left Janusz, and knocked at the door of his mother's boudoir.

Bertha opened it, and looked somewhat embarrassed

when she saw who it was. He did not notice it, but walked straight up to the baroness who, sitting in front of her triple mirror in her dressing-jacket, was occupied in rouging her heavy, pale cheeks. She looked up at her son, and gave him her hand to kiss. He responded formally, and said quickly—

"What does Janusz mean? He says Nicoline has left the house. What am I to understand by that?"

"What it means. She has left us," said his mother.

"But she hasn't run away just for fun. Something must have happened. But what?" demanded Siegfried.

The baroness kept silence and went on painting her face; but her hand visibly trembled.

"Mamma, I implore you. What has happened?"

She placed the powder-puff on the dressing-table, turned to him, looked him straight in the eyes, and said—

"If you really wish to know, she has behaved like the impertinent thing she is. She has betrayed herself. I'll have no spy and enemy in my house."

"Mother, I beg of you, stop these enigmatic speeches, and tell me plainly what has passed."

"Don't ask anything more. Be thankful we are rid of her," said his mother.

"But how? Why? You didn't turn her out?" said Siegfried.

The baroness did not reply.

"On my account, perhaps?" continued Siegfried.

"And if so? Wasn't I right?"

"Oh, mamma!" he exclaimed, and grasped the back of her chair with such force that he broke it.

The baroness contented herself with looking at him again, more fixedly and severely than before. She was sure of her power over his passionate but brief outbreaks. But this time he resisted longer than usual. He boldly returned her gaze, and said angrily—

"Where has she gone?"

"I don't know," replied his mother.

"Mamma, I don't believe that; it's not possible that you've sent her out into the streets without troubling

about what becomes of her. Has she gone home?" asked the young man.

The baroness wiped her cheeks in silence.

"Mamma," exclaimed Siegfried, almost shrieking, "answer me."

The baroness leaned back in her low chair, and in tones which betrayed suffering, said—

"I have had a heart attack to-day. Don't excite me, unless you wish to have your mother's death on your conscience."

Here Bertha interfered. "Her highness was really very bad this afternoon. We were obliged to send for the doctor. We feared her highness would not be able to go down to dinner."

"Go, Siegfried; leave me alone so that I may recover myself," ordered the baroness.

He understood that he must obey, and that in any case nothing was to be learned from his mother. He hurried back to his room and rang for Janusz.

"Do you know why Fräulein Flammert has gone away?" he asked the servant.

"No, your highness," replied the man.

"Where has she gone?" demanded Siegfried.

"I don't know, your highness," answered Janusz.

"I don't believe that. You know perfectly well," asserted Siegfried.

Janusz looked down and remained calm.

"Did she drive to the station?" Siegfried asked him.

"Perhaps. Probably, your highness," said the man.

"At what time did she leave the house?" Siegfried inquired.

"About half-past two," returned Janusz.

"There's no train to Diesa at that time. You're a liar. Leave the room."

Janusz took himself off with a contented expression of countenance. Siegfried leaned his head on his hand for a moment, and then went to find Frau Büchler. He knew that his old nurse helped in the kitchen at this hour. He went down and saw Janusz, Frau Büchler, and the cook standing together and eagerly whispering. As he

entered, the group broke up, and Janusz slipped into the servants' hall, while Frau Büchler trotted up to Siegfried. He signed to her to follow him, and began to question her almost before they had reached the hall.

Frau Büchler made no difficulties about informing him that Nicoline had driven off after a dispute with his mother, and had left a kind message for him. She had given the coachman Signora Conti's address. Her highness had sent a long telegram to Frau Flammert. She did not know its contents, for Bertha had taken it herself to the office, and so far had not told her anything.

Siegfried knew enough. "Tell mamma not to wait dinner for me," he said to Frau Büchler, who nodded, and, quickly putting on his overcoat, he left the house.

He was soon ringing at Signora Conti's door. The servant who opened it said his mistress was dining out, and had just driven away.

"Where is she dining?" asked Siegfried.

"I don't know," returned the man.

"It is most vexing," Siegfried could not restrain himself from uttering.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked the servant, who was preparing to shut the door.

"You can perhaps tell me what I want to know," said Siegfried, who stepped inside, and stood close to the surprised and somewhat suspicious servant. "Did Fräulein Flammert come to Signora Conti this afternoon?"

"Fräulein Flammert?" repeated the man.

"One of Signora Conti's pupils."

"I do not know the lady's name. There are so many——"

"I mean, did a young lady come with travelling things and a trunk?"

"Oh," exclaimed the servant, "yes, the young lady came, but drove away again directly."

"Where?"

"That I don't know. Our coachman could tell you. He drove her."

"If I only knew how could I get hold of him!" murmured Siegfried half to himself.

"He must be back here in half an hour at latest, unless he's driving round the Boulevards, or has to wait for the mistress all the evening. But that's very unlikely."

For a moment Siegfried was undecided whether to wait for the coachman in the house or in the street, but determined on the latter proceeding. He thanked the servant who stood vainly expecting a tip, and turned to go. The door was slammed behind him.

It was not a pleasant experience to spend the dinner-hour standing on the muddy pavement, in the cold damp air of a winter's evening, waiting for the servant, but he felt that it was the only thing to do. He must know whether Nicoline had left Paris. And if she was still there, he could not possibly put off seeing her till the next day. He must see her that very evening, find out from her what had taken place, make sure that nothing had happened to her, that she did not need his help, that she was all right. He tried to guess what had occurred. The extraordinary hints that his mother had given him in the morning came back vividly into his mind. Did she believe that Nicoline must protect herself from him? And that the only way was for her to leave the house? Yes, that must be it. And if it was so, then his mother's conduct was hard and cruel in the extreme. Did he deserve such suspicion? Was he capable of doing Nicoline any harm? He had far too much respect for her. She stood too far above him. But it was always the way. His mother did not know him, and she would not take the trouble to learn to know him. And it was this heart-breaking ignorance that made her act so hastily and cruelly towards Nicoline and himself. Yes, towards him. For he knew very well that even if Nicoline remained in Paris it would henceforth be very much more difficult for him to see her, and he should greatly miss her beautiful proud face, her strong character, her clever, amusing talk, her unfailing confidence in the future, her cheerful outlook on life. For the last three months he had become accustomed to her presence. He now first discovered that she had become a need to him, and formed the brightest and cheeriest point of his existence.

The carriage which now stopped before the house aroused him from his thoughts. Without waiting until the coachman summoned the servant to open the door for him, he astonished the man by asking—

"Where did you drive the young lady, who visited your mistress this afternoon, with her luggage?"

The coachman hesitated a little. The gentlemanly appearance of the tall young fellow with the splendid fur coat, awoke in him the feelings due to social rank, and before Siegfried had pressed a five-franc piece into his thick-gloved hand, he submissively named the street and the number of the house. He felt inclined to smile knowingly at him, for he understood Siegfried's inquiry, but the strange gentleman's manner offered no encouragement, and he preserved the correct demeanour of a servant.

Siegfried had not far to go to the boarding-house. He almost flew there, he was so delighted that Nicoline had not left Paris.

The girl was at dinner in the ugly boarding-house dining-room with fourteen other persons, chiefly ladies with two or three gentlemen. They had reached the dessert. Nicoline had only spoken a few words, and had scarcely eaten anything. The company took this for the natural modesty of a young girl at her first appearance in strange surroundings, and had tactfully spared her apparent shyness. But it was a false supposition. Nicoline did not concern herself in the least with her companions, and with the exception of two fellow-pupils, had scarcely noticed them. She was thoughtful and oppressed, without exactly knowing why. One of the two maids who waited at table came into the room, went up to Nicoline, who, as the latest comer sat at the lower end of the table, and whispered to her—

"Fräulein, there is a gentleman outside who wishes to see you."

"Ah," said Nicoline, quickly, and blushed a deep red, a fact that did not escape the maid, "have you shown him into the drawing-room?"

"I will do so at once," replied the girl.

It did not occur to Nicoline to ask who the gentleman

was. She knew perfectly well. Her first impulse was to jump up and hurry out of the room. But the meal was not quite over. All eyes were on her. She must wait for the remaining few minutes. "What!" she thought, after a brief hesitation, "am I to bother myself about these people? I shall do what I please." With entire self-possession she got up, and, with a hasty bow, left the room.

When she entered the drawing-room, which was on the opposite side of the hall, Siegfried turned towards her, his arms spread out, as if to draw her to his heart. Nicoline stopped, and satisfied herself with grasping both his hands.

"Forgive me for disturbing you during dinner," he said.

"Don't be so stupid," she replied quickly; and a slight smile played round her lips. "Do you know, you've waited a long while. It is eight o'clock, and I left before three."

"But, Nicoline, it's not my fault. How was I to know where you had gone? You did not leave word!"

"Where would have been your merit, if I had made it too easy? It was to be a little test," declared Nicoline.

"Did it really need a test?" asked Siegfried.

"It was necessary for me to know on whom I could rely. After your mother's conduct——"

"Tell me all about it, Nicoline. I know nothing. What has happened?"

"Didn't they tell you anything?"

"Nothing," said Siegfried. "Frau Büchler gave me your kind message, and told me you had gone to Signora Conti's. That was all."

"Whom did you question?"

"Mamma, of course, after Janusz had told me, in his stupid way, that you had gone away."

"Janusz is not stupid," asserted Nicoline; "but that's of no consequence. And what did your mother say?"

"She refused to give me any explanation," said Siegfried.

Nicoline looked searchingly at Siegfried. He returned

her glance without the least embarrassment. He was undoubtedly sincere.

"My dear friend," she said slowly, "your mamma is ill."

Siegfried nodded and looked sad.

"She imagines that she is being persecuted," continued Nicoline, "and that I am a spy in the pay of the Grand Duke Hilarius."

"No!" exclaimed Siegfried, and lifted his head in surprise.

"Exactly as I tell you. But shan't we sit down?—unless you've taken a vow to stand."

A load had fallen from her heart. She knew now that no thoughtless remarks of Siegfried had put ugly thoughts in the baroness's mind, and she was glad to be relieved of her suspicions of him.

Siegfried, too, felt greatly relieved. It was not his fault that Nicoline had been forced to leave the house in so unceremonious a fashion. It was another of the extraordinary whims in which his mother had lately indulged in increasing number.

"A spy of the Grand Duke!" murmured Siegfried, while he seated himself by the stove opposite to Nicoline. "That is really too—I mean, if that's the case, the matter can soon be set right. I'll speak to mamma this evening."

"Do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Nicoline, vehemently. "It can't be set right. If I am shown the door, I do not return."

"Not even if my mother herself begged it of you?" asked Siegfried.

"She will not do that. If she did—leave the matter alone. It is as it is."

"You say that so unconcernedly, Nicoline. Our house seems so desolate without you——"

She looked at the tips of her shoes.

"We were such good friends. How will it be now?"

Nicoline slightly shrugged her shoulders. At that moment, two gentlemen and three ladies entered the drawing-room, and bowed to the two occupants.

Siegfried looked at them in annoyance, returned their

greeting with the slightest of bows, and said softly to Nicoline—

"Must we stay here?"

The new-comers seated themselves round a table, but kept the pair by the stove well in view.

"My apartments, just now, are confined to a small bedroom," said Nicoline.

"Small or large, what does that matter?" retorted Siegfried.

"We can't go up to my room," said Nicoline.

"Why not?" he persisted.

"But, Prince Siegfried, what would the people here say?"

"It is the first time I ever heard you say you cared what other people thought. I took you to be too regal, too far above that sort of thing," said Siegfried.

"You have too good an opinion of me," she replied.

Siegfried said nothing. He did not perceive, or he did not heed, that his whispering and his confidential attitude damaged the girl in the eyes of her fellow-boarders as much as if he had gone to her room with her.

"What are you thinking of doing in the future?" he asked, after a pause.

"I must wait for mamma's decision. I want to stay in Paris, of all things in the world. I have made so much progress, even in this short time! Signora Conti stands alone, inimitable. She will enable me to be successful on the stage. Mamma will have to make greater sacrifices than she reckoned for. But how can I help it?"

"It is unfortunate that you should have to go through this! It would have been so nice if you had stayed quietly with us," declared Siegfried.

"That's over and done with," returned Nicoline.

"And if your mother does not consent to your staying?" asked Siegfried.

Nicoline smiled.

"Mamma will agree. I need perhaps a year to finish my studies. It would be a sin to break off now. I must also perfect myself in French. It is indispensable to me in my career."

"Always your career! Always ambition! Always the thought of shining!" objected Siegfried.

"Is that intended for a reproach?" asked Nicoline.

"As you choose to take it," he replied.

"Then it isn't a reproach. For your will is as determined in that direction as mine."

Siegfried contented himself with sighing. After a brief silence, he asked—

"And how shall I learn what you decide upon?"

"You'll come and ask," she said.

"May I?"

"Of course," she exclaimed but blushed deeply when she became conscious of her eagerness.

Siegfried got up.

"Are you going already?" said Nicoline.

"If I may. I've not dined yet——"

"What! and it's nearly half-past eight! Go at once. I had no idea. I should not have kept you so long."

"I can forget my hunger for a time when I talk to you," he said, looking into her eyes.

She pressed his hand as she walked with him to the drawing-room door.

When he had gone, her American fellow-pupil who had recommended her the boarding-house, came up to her with characteristic indiscretion, and observed—

"What a strikingly handsome man!"

"Do you think so?" said Nicoline, drily.

"Everybody would think so," returned the young lady. "The gentleman is not French?"

"No," said Nicoline, in the same tone as before, and added—

"Excuse me, I must go up. I have ever so many things to do."

She cared nothing for these people, but it vexed her that they should gossip about her.

The next day, shortly after two o'clock, a cab drove up to the Villa Josephine, and a handsome woman, in a fur cloak, got out. She walked quickly through the garden, and rang loudly at the door.

"Can I see the Baroness von Gronendal?" she asked Janusz, who opened it.

He looked at her in surprise. It was now unusual for his mistress to be asked for in that manner.

The stranger thought that he had not understood, and repeated her question in French with a very foreign accent.

"Her highness is just going out," said the servant, in German. "I do not know if she will receive visitors. Whom shall I say?"

"Frau Flammert from Diesa," she said, and stepped without hesitation into the hall.

Janusz gave a slight start of surprise. He had not recognized her, for when she brought Nicoline to Paris in October, he had only seen her for a moment. He hastened to show the lady into the drawing-room. He then went upstairs quickly, knocked at the door of the baroness's boudoir, and with a wink, whispered to Bertha, who opened it—

"Fräulein Nicoline's mother is here."

"Ah!" said Bertha, and shut the door. She repeated the man's words to the baroness who was dressed for going out.

"Very disagreeable," murmured the baroness. "But I suppose I must see her—eh?"

"I think so," Bertha satisfied herself with replying.

Leaning on her stick, the baroness went slowly and heavily downstairs into the drawing-room, the door of which Janusz opened for her and closed behind her.

Frau Flammert stood at the window. She had kept on her cloak. The baroness went towards her with outstretched hand. The singer went a few steps forward to meet her, took no notice of the hand, and without giving her time to utter a word of greeting, exclaimed excitedly—

"Good morning. Where is Nicoline?"

"Now, now, my dear friend, take off your things and sit down. I had not expected you so soon."

"That surprises me. But where is Nicoline?"

"She went to Signora Conti's," said the baroness.

"Ah!" said Frau Flammert, and drew a breath of relief. "That was the most sensible thing the child could have done. Good-bye. I must hasten to the signora's."

"Carlotta," cried the baroness, "you'll leave me like this?"

"I must first learn why Nicoline left you."

"I think I can tell you that," said the baroness.

"Yes, your telegram told me. But now I must hear about it from my child. Good-bye, baroness."

She lifted the *portière*.

"You'll come back, Carlotta?" asked the baroness.

"Yes, later," said Frau Flammert without turning round, and hurried from the room.

The baroness sank upon the sofa, and murmured to Bertha, who now came into the room, and looked at her with a questioning glance—

"I have never in my whole life seen such an ill-bred woman. That's the thanks one gets for one's kindness."

Nicoline sat opposite Siegfried in the boarding-house drawing-room; he had come soon after lunch to inquire how she was getting on.

She had slept better than she had expected after the excitements of the day; she had been in capital voice in the morning, and everything had gone splendidly. Signora Conti had questioned her closely. She had told her that it was impossible to get on with the princess, since she believed herself to be watched and spied on by the Courts with which she was connected. Signora Conti smiled, although she expressed herself very cautiously. It would be best that he should repeat that to his mother, so that if she saw Signora Conti, and discussed the matter, she might be prudent. For if she so far forgot herself as to say anything bad of her——

"Nicoline," said Siegfried, "how can you think that?"

"People who are nervous and ill often——"

At that moment she heard some one come into the hall, and ask the servant who opened the door, for Fräulein Flammert. Nicoline jumped up as if she had been shot, stood still for a second, and flew out of the room like a fleet doe, without giving any heed to Siegfried, who

had heard nothing, and who stared at her in astonishment.

"Mummy, you!"

"Nico! Darling!" With a double cry, mother and daughter sank in each other's arms.

"How is it possible? How did you get here so quickly?" exclaimed Nicoline, cuddling up against her mother, and covering her face with kisses.

The maid tactfully withdrew.

"Show me your room," said Frau Flammert, keeping her arm round her daughter.

"Come, mummy," said Nicoline, releasing herself and hurrying on so fast, that her mother could scarcely keep up with her.

Once in the room, there was more embracing, and while Nicoline took off her mother's hat, cloak, and gloves, she said—

"I recognized your voice at once. I knew I could not be mistaken. But I hardly trusted my ears. How could you be in Paris?"

"What? Did you imagine that, after I received the telegram I shouldn't put myself in the train at once——"

"The telegram?" asked Nicoline.

"You did not telegraph, you naughty child; but the Baroness——"

"Ah! let me see," asked Nicoline.

Frau Flammert hesitated.

"Show me, mummy, quick," insisted Nicoline.

Her mother took from her pocket a crumpled telegram worn by much reading, and handed it to the girl. She read eagerly—"Sorry obliged inform you that the propinquity of Nicoline and my son under one roof awakes doubt. Nicoline's return to Diesa urgently desired. Nicoline refuses to return. After painful dispute with her must part. Consider girl's remaining in Paris without surveillance dangerous. Renounce further responsibility. Must immediately interfere with maternal authority. Kind regards.—JOSEPHINE."

She was very red when she handed the paper back to her mother, who had closely watched her while she read it.

"Now, tell me all about it," she said.

"What is there to tell?" returned Nicoline. "The poor baroness is perfectly mad. She seems to imagine that I——" She hesitated.

"That you?"

"Ah! mummy, it's too stupid," she murmured, putting her face against her mother's, and whispering softly in her ear, "she imagines that I—that I—am trying to catch Siegfried——"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Frau Flammert, drawing back, and holding Nicoline by the shoulders at arm's length from her.

"And further," continued Nicoline more calmly and, firmly, "that I am doing it as a commission from the Grand Duke Hilarius."

Frau Flammert laughed heartily, but immediately became serious again.

"The woman is certainly fit for an asylum. The Grand Duke! As if he cares in the least what she does!"

She was silent for a time. Then she asked gently, but emphatically—

"But what put this nonsense into her head? Nicoline, you must tell your mother everything."

"Mother, have I ever concealed anything from you?" asked Nicoline.

"It would give me great pain if I had to think so."

"Have I ever told you an untruth?"

"God forbid!" said her mother.

"Well, then, I assure you that it is a pure piece of imagination. The baroness is entirely mistaken."

"Haven't you been imprudent? haven't you flirted just a little bit? You are a beautiful girl, and no one could be indifferent to a word or look of yours," said Frau Flammert.

"Others don't see me with your eyes, mummy darling," smiled Nicoline. "No. I have not the slightest cause to reproach myself. At least, not so far as I know."

"Has the young man paid you any attention?" asked her mother.

Nicoline cast down her eyes, and blushed again. "What do you mean by paying me attention?"

"Now, Nicoline, you're not being frank with me," exclaimed Frau Flammert.

"Indeed I am, mamma," said Nicoline, quickly. "There is no question of that. We have been just friendly, like any two people living in the same house. He has never said a word that could harm me."

"H'm—harm! Were you much alone together, Nico?"

Nicoline looked down.

"Nico, look me straight in the face and answer me."

Nicoline moved impatiently, looked her mother full in the face, and said in a determined tone—

"Mummy, since you wish it, I'll put the dots on the 'i's.' Siegfried does like me. I should be blind not to see it. And it's quite natural. You can have no idea how lonely, dull, and unhappy the poor fellow's life is. He is pleased to have found a human being to whom he can speak out and who sympathizes with him. I pity him. Is that wrong?"

Her mother was silent, and reflected. "Pity—pity," she murmured to herself. "The young man is evidently in love with you."

"No, mummy," exclaimed Nicoline, passionately. "We are good friends, comrades, nothing more."

"The baroness is an absurd fool. But it is perhaps as well that you have left the house."

"Yes, indeed," corroborated Nicoline, eagerly. "You don't know what goes on there—debts and quarrels and money cares, and peevish tempers——"

"You wrote about that——"

"I didn't write everything," continued Nicoline. "It was really most uncomfortable."

"I can't understand how I ever came to let you go," said Frau Flammert. "But she asked it in so kindly a way, and it was so important that you should have some one to look after you in Paris."

"Don't make excuses for yourself, mummy."

"Yes, it was stupidly thoughtless of me," affirmed her mother. "However, it can't be helped now. The thing is over and done with. But it is unpardonable that the baroness should have turned you out in such summary

fashion, instead of first sending for me. Just imagine my thoughts during that horrible night in the train."

"Mummy, you knew I should not come to any harm."

"You are right. If all at once I had found myself in a strange town without a roof or home, I don't believe I should have known what to do," said her mother.

"Yes, you——" rejoined Nicoline. But she did not continue, and changed the subject. "See how—how wisely you acted. You rush off directly you get the telegram, without waiting to ask if I had started home, as the baroness wished. Why, we might have passed each other without knowing it somewhere between Strasburg and Carlsruhe."

Frau Flammert, taken aback, hung her head, and said irritably—

"That's right; scold me well."

"But, mummy, how could I?" exclaimed Nicoline, and petted her mother more affectionately than before. "I know why you did it, why you didn't take time for reflection."

"What should I have done? What would you have done in my place?" asked Frau Flammert.

"I should have telegraphed to my Nicoline——"

"That would have been clever! Where could I have telegraphed? I did not know where you were," she objected.

"I should have telegraphed to the baroness, and reckoned that, in spite of her headstrong stupidity, she would have sent it on to me. Or, no. I should have waited quietly until I got a letter from my Nico. It is on the way. That you can well think, mummy."

"No, I can't cultivate a Juno-like repose when I know that my child is in difficulties."

"In difficulties. No, no——"

"Why didn't you telegraph to me?" interrupted her mother. "That was very inconsiderate and blameworthy."

"Thanks, mummy, now we're quits. I did not

telegraph to you because I did not take the affair so tragically."

"Thank you, again."

"No. It doesn't do to get excited. In your place, mummy, I should have kept calm, because I should have had confidence in my Nico."

"Very well, we'll leave that. What's to be done now?" said Frau Flammert.

"What's to be done now? First, is that handbag all your luggage? Where is your trunk?" asked Nicoline.

"On the cab waiting at the door."

"But, mummy, send it away and have the trunk brought up. I will find out if there is a nice room free, and, if not, you must share my bed. It's not so small. Oh! how nice that would be!" She rang the bell.

"What have you got into your head now?" exclaimed Frau Flammert. "Do you suppose I'm going to settle in Paris? I am going back to-night, and shall take you with me."

The maid appeared and Nicoline gave her the order about the cab and the trunk. When she had gone, Nicoline turned to her mother and asked—

"You are not in earnest?"

"Indeed I am."

"Two nights following! You'll make yourself ill."

"What can I do? I'm a poor captive beast! I ought to have sung yesterday evening, and am to sing to-morrow evening. I got the telegram at five o'clock, just a few minutes too late for the Orient express. I was beside myself. Half an hour before the performance I sent a message to the theatre that I couldn't play, and went at once to the station so as to avoid questioning and talk. The director will have been in a terrible way. I don't know how he will have got out of the scrape. They have nobody who can take my place at a moment's notice, And the prince, who had invited himself to supper! I must telegraph home at once that they may count on me for to-morrow. Give me a pen."

"Mummy, you can't. You won't be in voice. And I must part with you again——"

Frau Flammert did not let her continue. "Be quiet, my dear: I must. They will have greatly blamed me already. And the prince has such a horror of these sort of surprises. Give me a sheet of paper."

There was nothing to be done. Nicoline gave her mother what she asked for, and had the two telegrams sent off.

"There!" said Frau Flammert! "And now, get everything ready so that we may bid Signora Conti farewell, and dine in peace."

"Why bid her farewell? You do not really mean that you're going to take me with you?"

"Of course!"

"Mummy, you won't."

"But, my dear, you can't remain in Paris alone."

"Why not?"

"I should not have an hour's peace."

"Mummy, let me speak. You are not so old-fashioned as that. What do all Signora Conti's pupils do? They are all alone here."

"What they do has nothing to do with us."

"And you'll tear me away in the midst of my studies! Didn't Signora Conti tell you what progress I am making?"

"I did not wait to ask. I only asked where you were to be found."

"Well, but do ask. It would be a sin to interrupt my work, just when I am in the swing of it."

"Singing is to be learnt in Diesa."

"You know how far I got there, and you'll see what progress I've made here."

"It's no use, my dear. We must go back."

"Mummy, you might at least leave me here till August. Then I can make my *début* in the autumn, and a new life will begin for all of us."

Frau Flammert gave a deep sigh. At that moment a servant knocked at the door, and brought in the elegant leather trunk. When he had gone, she said—

"You imagine it's all so easy. In fact, it's not so at all. You think I'm very rich. But I shall find it very difficult to spare the four hundred francs a month which

it has cost up to now. And the five hundred or six hundred that will be needed in the future is beyond my resources."

Nicoline angrily stamped her foot. "Do you mean that such a trifle gives you anxiety? That is a shame. The prince must give me the money. It is no sacrifice for him, and I have a right to demand it."

"Nico! What an idea!" exclaimed Frau Flammert, and an expression of anxiety passed over her face.

"Well! if there's no other way, I'm not going to be worried about that. I shall speak to the prince myself."

"Be quiet," ordered her mother, vehemently, and put her hand on her mouth. There was a pause, during which both visibly struggled with their thoughts. The mother was the first to break the silence. "And even if the expense could be got over—I'm not easy—about this business with young Gronendal."

Nicoline jumped up from the little sofa on which she was sitting by her mother, blushed a fiery red, and rushed out of the door before Frau Flammert could question her or keep her back. She had entirely forgotten that she had left Siegfried in the drawing-room without a word of explanation, and hurried off now to dismiss him in proper form. But he was no longer there. After waiting a little he had gone.

"What's the matter?" asked Frau Flammert, when Nicoline returned.

"Nothing, mummy; I'd forgotten something."

"What was it?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

"You must tell me."

"Baron von Gronendal was here when you came, and I left him somewhat unceremoniously."

"What! Gronendal is here?"

"No; he's gone."

"He comes to see you here in the boarding-house?"

"Why shouldn't he, mummy?"

"Nico, I shall not leave you in Paris. You must come back with me."

Nicoline put her arm round her mother's neck, nestled up against her, and said very seriously and very firmly—

"Mamma, what do you fear?"

"You are a thoughtless, innocent child. You don't know——"

"Mothers make mistakes. Forgive me. I am neither thoughtless, nor innocent, nor a child. I mean in the sense of a little goose. I don't, perhaps, know everything, but as much as affects myself. You know I am pure-minded. You have sometimes said almost morbidly so. I shall always preserve myself from stain. You can rely on that, mother."

"Stain! We need not think of stain. Gronendal may have serious intentions; but even so, it would not be a happy thing for you."

"Mamma, I will be quite frank with you. Not a shadow of reserve shall be between us. I, too, have thought of that. It is possible that Siegfried may wish to marry me. But I do not wish it. In the first place, he's not a good match. Neither am I. We should not improve each other's position. His is ambiguous; he has not even a fixed name. He depends on the favour of hard-hearted people, and from one day to the next may be left without means. His poor mother would object, and you will understand that that would not suit me. No. In any case, he must wait. That will be good for both of us. I must first become famous and rich. In the interval, his position may perhaps improve, and his constancy and truth will be tested. Then we can see."

Frau Flammert listened to her open-mouthed, and her expression was a mingling of astonishment and horror, at which Nicoline was obliged to smile.

"And you've thought all that out so calmly and clearly?"

"Yes. Who could do it for me, mummy, if I didn't do it for myself?"

Frau Flammert shook her head slowly. "You're too prudent for a singer."

"What an idea, mamma! A singer can't be too prudent."

Frau Flammert heaved a deep sigh. "If I'd only had your sense!"

Nicoline drew her mother to her bosom, cradled her head there, as if she had been the mother and Frau Flammert the child, and said softly, in tender flattering tones—

"Mummy darling, don't be modest. You've got plenty of sense, but more heart. That's why you're such an angel. It would certainly have been better if you'd always had me at your side. My advice would have been useful. Your mother was a simple kind of woman. Many things made an impression on you that would leave me quite indifferent. You must understand that, mummy, and therefore there's no need to fear for me."

Frau Flammert understood her very well, so well that the tears rose to her eyes, and flowed slowly down her cheeks.

Nicoline kissed them away. "Don't cry, mummy. Why should you? There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"Everything's wrong, if you won't come back with me."

"That's our fate. But material distance does not really separate us. I'm always with you in thought. Don't cry. You torture yourself quite needlessly. When a creature like me doesn't see the least little spot in you, and respects and honours you, that's something. How much do I counterbalance? A million, ten million, say, mummy."

Frau Flammert said nothing, but yielded to her daughter's caresses.

"Then, mamma, it's settled. I stay here, at least until the year's up. And if you have no money, then the prince must——"

"Nothing of the kind," exclaimed her mother, vehemently.

"You must pawn some jewels you don't want. I've no conscience about it, for I'm quite sure I shall be able to redeem them for you in a very short time."

Frau Flammert was no match for her daughter. She

hung her head in silence, and Nicoline understood that she had conquered. Now she tried to persuade her mother to remain longer in Paris. But that she positively refused to do. Her long connection with a Court theatre had engendered conscientious habits of work, and the director's displeasure was a terror to her.

Four hours remained until the departure of the Orient express, and they flew like a moment. Nicoline wanted her mother to rest, but she was not to be persuaded to do so. All cause for anxiety being removed, she recovered her energy, and was the beautiful, imaginative, and for her forty years, astonishingly young artist, who bewitched all who came in contact with her. She changed the position of the furniture in her child's room, she interviewed the landlady, who felt as if she had had an audience with royalty. Frau Flammert made Nicoline sing to her, and accompanied her herself on the semi-grand piano in the drawing-room, and was immensely pleased with her voice, her certainty, and her grace and charm, paid a second visit to Signora Conti with Nicoline, and had a long and hopeful discussion about her daughter's future. The mother and daughter then dined together at a restaurant near the Gare de l'Est, and Frau Flammert found time to retail a whole budget of Court gossip. Nicoline was naturally most interested in the Loewensteins and their relations and connections, and about the Gronendals' claims and doings. Her mother gave Nicoline all the money she had with her that she could spare as she got into the sleeping-car, and took as passionate a farewell of her as if it had been for life.

The landlady received Nicoline on her return with enthusiastic praise of her mother's beauty, distinction, and charm. Nicoline thanked her shortly and somewhat impatiently, remarked that she should not go in to dinner, as she had already dined, and went to her room.

About an hour and a half later, the housemaid entered, and told her that the Prince of Loewenstein-Franka—her pronunciation of the name beggars description, but Nicoline understood her—was waiting in the drawing-room. It was the first time that he had so

called himself, and the impression it made upon the servant appeared to be very strong. Nicoline hesitated a moment, and then said—

"I will come directly."

She soon appeared in the drawing-room, where a few of the boarders were sitting and whispering together. Siegfried went quickly towards her, and grasping her hand, said softly—

"I found out at home that it was your mother. You left me so suddenly that I didn't know what to make of it."

"When my mother arrives unexpectedly in Paris to see me, I can't stand on ceremony."

"Of course not. I'm not blaming you. Now for the important thing. Are you going to remain in Paris?" asked Siegfried.

"Yes."

"Ah! Capital! I am glad. If it isn't too late—but perhaps your mother is tired after the night journey—I should like to pay my respects to her——"

"She's already gone," said Nicoline.

"What?" exclaimed Siegfried.

They had both stood through this rapid interchange of words, and Nicoline did not ask Siegfried to sit down. As she did not reply to his last exclamation, he continued—

"May I venture to ask how your mother took the disagreeable episode?"

"Just as I did," rejoined Nicoline. "But forgive me, Prince Siegfried, if I don't keep you any longer now. I begin to feel the effects of these two exciting days, and my nerves need rest. Good night. Good-bye." She grasped his hand, shook it firmly, and disappeared through the door.

Siegfried, much disconcerted, remained standing in the middle of the room, and stared at the departing figure. But when he remembered that eight or ten eyes were observing him, he bowed stiffly and went.

The discussion with her mother compelled Nicoline to see clearly what had hitherto been indefinite and vague. She became conscious of her feelings for Siegfried, and her relations to him took definite shape in her imagination.

She felt warm friendship for him, she would like to be his adviser, protector, patroness; but, if he desired more, he must first deserve it. Meanwhile intercourse with him must not place the least importunity on her, not even that of a polite control of momentary moods. She felt that it might have been quite different if things had developed without interference, if their inclinations had grown unconsciously. The baroness's rough interference had crushed out all tenderness. So much the worse.

In the Villa Josephine the atmosphere was more stormy than ever. Mother and son were more estranged than before. Siegfried could not forgive his mother for turning Nicoline out of the house and depriving him of the presence that had made his life so much brighter. On her side the baroness was specially annoyed at his coldness, which politeness scarcely veiled, because she was convinced that she had been forced to an unpleasant and disturbing course of action entirely for his advantage. She could only relieve her feelings in speaking to Bertha, to whom she daily complained of her son's ingratitude. "I have got into Frau Flammert's bad books," she said the day after her hostile interview with the singer. "She'll set Prince Johann against us. He might have been a support. I reckoned on him. But I was obliged to act as I did in order to save Siegfried from a piece of stupidity for which there would have been no reparation. And this is the thanks I get."

"Yes," said Bertha, "the prince is exactly like his father—he only thinks of himself."

"What nonsense you talk!" rejoined the baroness. "My angel prince never failed to see when anything was done for his good. Siegfried doesn't think of himself; he doesn't think of anything."

Just before Christmas, another event greatly disturbed her. Little Posner appeared one afternoon at an unusual hour at the Villa Josephine, and, as the baroness was out, waited until she returned. She was surprised to hear from Janusz, who opened the door, that Posner had been waiting in the drawing-room for half an hour. She sent Bertha to ask him what he wanted. He said that he must see her

highness herself. She kept him waiting while she changed her dress, and then went down to the drawing-room.

"What procures me this pleasure, my dear Herr Posner?" she asked.

He respectfully kissed the large hand she offered him, and replied in flattering tones—

"Nothing very special, your highness. Only a little business formality. Things have been going badly on the Stock Exchange for the last few days. Everything has gone down. I would not trouble your highness about it yesterday. I hoped things would go better to-day. But, on the contrary, they are still more flat, and I thought it my duty to recommend your highness to make your position easier."

"What am I to understand by that, my dear Herr Posner?"

"I mean that your highness should sell a part of your shares, perhaps the half, so as to diminish the risk. It can't be done even now without loss, but that need not specially worry your highness since both the last settlements were so favourable."

"Loss! That's a pleasant outlook!" said the baroness, gloomily, and unconsciously put her hand to her heart, which began to beat painfully.

"It won't be very serious, I hope," Posner hastened to reassure her. "And with what you keep back, you'll recoup yourself. I think this is only a passing disturbance. A brief storm, then sunshine returns."

"Well, if it must be—I understand these matters so little—I must rely entirely on your skill——"

Posner, against his will, was obliged to smile at that word; but he soon recovered his seriousness, and replied—

"Your highness can assuredly place every confidence in me. I always keep your interests in view. I advise you as I should advise myself. Nothing could be more prudent. But no one on the Stock Exchange is infallible, not even Rothschild."

An embarrassing pause ensued, which Posner broke after a while: getting up, he observed—

"We decide then, your highness, to sell the half of your shares at the first price to-morrow. If that is too unfavourable, I will see what it will be best to do. I am on the spot. And"—he said this with hesitation and with some confusion—"for the other half the stockbroker insists on payment——" The baroness looked at him without the least sign of comprehension. "These people always get anxious when there is a downward tendency. And we can't blame them if they ask for security——"

"What security?"

"Twenty thousand francs would be sufficient, I think."

The baroness grew angry. "What! Do I understand you rightly? I am to give twenty thousand francs?"

"Give! No, your highness, only to place them as security for the time."

"Isn't my name sufficient? Am I not trusted?"

"Of course, your highness, of course. But it is a general decision from which no one can stand apart. It is the stockbroker's duty to demand security from his clients."

"But it hasn't been done before," objected the baroness.

"That was from negligence. We mustn't complain because the regulations are held to."

"And where am I to find twenty thousand francs all of a sudden?" asked the baroness.

"I brought your highness more than eighteen thousand francs out of the last two settlements."

"You keep a very strict account of my money. Do you suppose I put it in a stocking, or bury it in the cellar? I shouldn't meddle with the Stock Exchange if I had superfluous money."

The interview began to be very uncomfortable for Posner.

"It need not be ready money," he put in, "paper will do."

"I've nothing in paper here," she said sharply.

"Jewels would, if necessary, do for security," rejoined Posner, anxiously.

"I'm not a cook that I should be asked to give security," she broke out angrily.

"Your highness need not get so annoyed, really not. It is merely a Stock Exchange custom. Even crowned heads, when they go in for speculation——"

The baroness interrupted him impatiently. "Do me the favour of giving the security yourself, if it is really demanded."

"I?" exclaimed Posner, in amazement.

"Am I asking too much of your friendship? The security is not touched actually, if I have understood you correctly?"

"That is—of course—it is presumed that the business may be carried through easily. But it is most unusual for the agent——"

"It is likewise most unusual for a duchess of a reigning house to do business on the Stock Exchange," interrupted the baroness, with a scornful smile.

"Not as unusual as your highness thinks. Much less so than that an agent——"

"I ask it of you." She said it so that it sounded like a command.

Posner gazed at the imperious eyes turned on him, cast down his own, bowed, and murmured humbly—

"Your highness—I will see. I will do what is possible——"

The baroness got up, gave him her hand, which he kissed with noticeably less devotion than before.

"Keep me informed of what goes on, my dear friend. I count upon your bringing me after New Year at least as much as the last time. I am greatly in need of it. You mustn't fail me."

"Alas! your highness, if only we could be always sure of winning——" he tried to object, but broke off when he noticed her impatience. It seemed to him useless to try to prove anything to a woman who so obstinately followed her own thoughts, and he made his adieux without adding another word.

Christmas Eve fell the next day. A tall Christmas

tree stood in the drawing-room of the Villa Josephine, on a pedestal draped with stuff of the Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka colours. A big star made of gold paper, and two flags of the Grand Duchy, were fastened to the topmost bough. Otherwise it was decorated in the usual way. Gifts for Siegfried, Count Laporte, and the Dormans, who were invited to the Christmas party, lay on the drawing-room table; on another were those destined for the servants. It had been growing dark for the last half-hour, the guests were in the dining-room, with Siegfried at the tea-table, and Janusz had been told to light the candles on the Christmas tree, when a letter was brought to the baroness. It was a communication from one of her unknown stockbrokers that her business on the Stock Exchange had been wound up that day, and left her a debtor to the tune of eight thousand five hundred francs. She had to read the printed form that was filled in with a not too legible handwriting several times, in order to discover what it was all about. It was the more difficult for her to understand because hitherto she had only had to do with Posner, and not directly with the stock-broker who carried out her orders. When at length, with Bertha's assistance, she understood, her intense anger brought on a heart attack, and she was obliged to let Bertha put her to bed. She sent her excuses to her guests, the presentation of gifts took place without her, and was soon over. The inmates of the house were so depressed that the guests thought it better to depart, although they had been definitely asked to stay for dinner. Siegfried found the loneliness on a holiday evening so intolerable that, when he ascertained that his mother would not come down to dinner, he preferred to dine in one of the restaurants on the Boulevards. Afterwards he would go and see Nicoline, so that he might feel like Christmas for half an hour, recount his depressing Christmas Eves at Castle Lindenheim and in the Grand Ducal Castle at Franka, and hear her talk of the Diesa Christmas celebrations, at which Prince Johann never failed to put in an appearance, even if he could only spare a quarter of an hour.

As soon as the baroness had recovered a little, she sent an excited letter to Posner by express, asking what the stockbroker's official document meant, and why he had gone beyond the instructions, which had expressly been to sell half her shares and keep the other half until the storm had blown over. She ended by saying that she counted on seeing him the next morning, and on a verbal and satisfactory explanation.

Posner took good care not to accept the invitation. About noon the baroness, who was waiting in a condition of great irritation and impatience, received, instead of Posner, a letter, in which he politely, but briefly, informed her that, to guard against the risk of further loss, he had found it advisable to settle all her obligations. The difference would not have to be paid until January 5th, so she had plenty of time to arrange. There would still remain a gain of nearly ten thousand francs, and for a first attempt that was not so bad. It went without saying that he was always at her service, if she cared to make use of him again.

The baroness was beside herself. Although it was the luncheon hour, she sent Janusz in a cab to Coppée, with the commission to bring him back under any circumstances, whether he was at luncheon or had gone out, and had to be fetched away from some party. Hardly had a quarter of an hour elapsed before the young man stood in her own drawing-room. He seemed to be in a very bad temper. Janusz had caught him while he was dressing to go to lunch with a celebrated actress, whom he hoped to interest in a piece by himself and a friend. Coppée's temper did not improve when the baroness received him with knitted brows, and, instead of apologizing for inconveniencing him, handed him, with a cursory greeting, the communications from Posner and the stockbroker, and said, in a tone of command—

"Read those! That's my Christmas gift."

Coppée read them, screwed his eye-glass into his eye, while he returned them, and observed coldly—

"Thank you, your highness. Very interesting. Little Posner has done very well."

The baroness stared at him. She had the impression that he was wickedly making fun of her.

"What! You find it all right that the man should ruin me?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, your highness, he speaks of ten thousand francs gain."

"I've long since disposed of that. I must now pay so much out of my pocket that breath fails me."

"Well, that's always so in speculation. You must say to yourself, 'A ball is round and turns. What is below comes uppermost, and *vice versâ*,'" Coppée assured her.

"That's all very wisely observed," said the baroness, "but it doesn't help me. I confess that I have a good mind not to trouble about the affair at all."

"How do you mean, princess?"

"I mean that I shall not pay what these people demand."

"I fear, princess," said the young man, in icy tones, "that is not a happy thought. People do not understand jokes in business. They would be quite ready to serve you with a writ. There would not be the least doubt of your condemnation."

"I should just like to let it come to that. I do not know the stockbroker. I have done everything through your friend Posner, and he has acted without my sanction and not in accordance with his own statements. Let him get out of the mess as best he may."

"Princess, you are not in earnest."

"You'll soon be convinced that I am."

"Then let me emphatically warn you. The bailiffs will distrain you for what you refuse to pay of your own free will. I should be very sorry if there was a scandal, both for your sake, princess, and for that of Posner, for whom I feel responsible, since it was I who introduced him to you."

The blood mounted to the baroness's face, and she exclaimed, in a voice shaking with anger—

"Am I to be spared nothing? I receive a stockjobber, a Jew, and even his wife, invite them to dinner,

and in return they swindle me out of some thousands of francs! Threaten me with distraint! That's a little strong."

Coppée got up, bowed to the baroness, and said, with an impertinent smile—

"Your highness, you're visibly nervous to-day. Under such conditions, it would be very wrong to irritate you by contradiction. Allow me to withdraw."

He did not wait for permission, but took his departure without further ceremony.

As soon as he had gone, the baroness recognized that she had committed a fault. Coppée had done her numerous favours with the Press, which she greatly overrated. If she quarrelled with him, not only would he do her no more favours, but she also feared he might make her a butt in the newspapers. That sort of thing amused her greatly when it concerned other people in society. But she did not desire to be held up to ridicule herself.

She was in such a bad humour the whole day that every one who could, avoided her. Only Bertha was unable to do so. She was obliged to weather the storm. The resolution to get away from all the discomfort became more decided than ever, and more than once during the afternoon the formal notice had been on her lips. What prevented it was a mixture of cowardice and pity, and a dim foreboding that things could not long go on as they were, that something must happen which would procure her the desired liberty without necessity for a breach with her mistress.

Towards evening the baroness grew calm enough to take counsel with Bertha. The maid strongly advised her to pay the difference, and never again to meddle in such matters.

"That is cleverly said," exclaimed the baroness. "Do you suppose I should have had dealings with a Jew if it had not been so pressingly needful?"

"Yes," returned Bertha, calmly, "if only more reliance could be placed on such proceedings. First it's all jubilation, and then it's all woe."

"And where's the money to come from? Have you thought of that?" asked the baroness.

"Yes," said Bertha, simply. And she explained to her mistress that she must alter the arrangements that she had made, and instruct Osterburg to send her the allowance at New Year as usual.

"That'll help us greatly! It's only just enough to satisfy the swindling stockjobber, and I shall have absolutely nothing left. And, maybe, Osterburg has already had expenses, and has taken them out of the five thousand gulden."

"But it's the only thing we can do meanwhile. Your highness will see afterwards what more can be done."

The baroness then wrote out a telegram to Dr. von Osterburg that would have cost over twenty francs. Bertha calmly commented on its length. The baroness tried to shorten it, but could only do so at the cost of its clearness. Discouraged, she laid down the pen, her eyes filled with tears, and she said, in a hoarse voice—

"It's come to this, then. I must count the halfpence. If my angel prince knew that, he would turn in his grave."

"Yes, that's true," remarked Bertha, with well-feigned innocence; "his highness always disliked arithmetic." When she noticed the tears in her mistress's eyes, she added, "I think, your highness, that the telegram is quite unnecessary. A letter will do as well. We should disturb the doctor in his sleep. He does not receive the allowance till the second, so a letter will reach him quite soon enough."

The baroness agreed.

She counted on a reply from Osterburg by return of post. But she did not receive a letter from him until January 4th, after she had reminded him by telegraph on the 2nd that she expected to hear from him. The lawyer wrote that he was very sorry to be unable to carry out her highness's new directions. Without losing any time he had acted as they had definitely arranged, the treaty of purchase for a portion of a house had been legally concluded, the five thousand gulden which he had

received two days previously from the trustees hardly sufficed for the settlement of expenses that had been already incurred, and he must humbly beg her highness, in view of the payment for the house, to realize the ready money as soon as possible, so that he might have the entry made in the Land Register, and commence the suit against the family.

That was a hard though scarcely an unexpected blow, and it was not the only one. Bills poured into the house at the turn of the year, and they had to be left unsettled. The next day there came a document from the stockbroker, in which she was summoned to go that very day to the cashier, or legal proceedings would at once be commenced against her. That alarmed her greatly, the more so as Bertha, too, looked anxious. She did not wish to ask her Paris lawyer's advice, for it was not advisable for him to know her circumstances too minutely. She confided only in old Count Laporte, who came to lunch, and, while they were drinking their coffee, made an attempt at asking a loan. The baroness was forced to refuse, and she took the opportunity of referring to her own difficulties. She told him, of course from her point of view, of the adventure with Posner, and showed him the stockbroker's threatening letter. Count Laporte took the matter very seriously, and strongly advised her not to let it come into the law-courts. With a heavy heart she decided to swallow the bitter pill, and begged Laporte to go to the broker and ask for a delay, as some time must elapse before she could procure the ready money.

Count Laporte's mission was unsuccessful. With no attempt at politeness, the broker insisted on having the money at once, and nothing remained for the baroness but to pawn her jewels. The unpleasant commission fell to Bertha, who had to have the receipt made out in her name. Thus the name of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka would not be tarnished, the baroness affirmed. In fact, she wished to avoid signing herself as Baroness von Gronendal, for all official documents bore that signature.

The sale of her Franka mortgage could no longer be avoided. That was her last resource. She must write to

her Franka lawyer. Even that simple business presented difficulties through the false position in which she had put herself. She knew the lawyer to be a pedant who worked almost like a machine, and invariably refused to carry out any suggestion that was not in full accordance with the regulations. He would probably have dismissed a document from the Princess von Loewenstein-Franka as unseemly jesting with serious matters. She did not believe in calling herself Baroness von Gronendal when treating with a Loewenstein official. There was much head-breaking before she cleverly found a way out by signing herself "Josephine, widow of his Royal Highness, Prince Albrecht of Loewenstein-Franka." The formula was unusual, and the lawyer considered its familiarity somewhat improper. For he had never received a letter from a lady not a member of his family, merely signed with her Christian name. But the signature offered no objection from the legal point of view, and the lawyer contented himself with signifying his disapproval by the manner in which he addressed his reply to "Madame Josephine, Baroness von Gronendal, widow of his Royal Highness Prince Albrecht of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level," thickly underlining the name Gronendal.

It was nearly four weeks before the lawyer could send her the sum she had demanded. Meanwhile she suffered much annoyance, for Siegfried bore the large reduction in his pocket-money with the greatest impatience, and Bertha had to make several journeys to the pawnbroker's.

When the scarcely remarkable sum from Franka arrived, the baroness felt so deeply discouraged, that she burst into loud sobs. Bertha tried to comfort her by conventional speeches, but she exclaimed—

"Be silent. Leave me in peace. I know too well what is weighing on my heart."

And speaking more to herself than to the maid, complained—

"The Grand Duke is right to make fun of me: the game is up."

She learned that the Grand Duke had said that at

dinner when he heard, through a letter to Frau Büchler, who kept up a fairly regular correspondence with friends in the service of the Court, that the baroness had sold her Franka mortgage.

"The tiger sees me beg or starve, and is glad. And what remains for me? When these few thousand francs are gone, I have literally nothing."

"Let us hope the Vienna lawsuit will be decided before that," suggested Bertha.

"Yes, I hope so. But if it isn't? Then I must give up the game. And I have become an old woman! People used to envy my happiness. They should have waited till the end. A bad end, Bertha, a bad end," she continued after a short pause, while she dried her eyes. "Have I deserved it? As a child I was a celebrated artist. If I had gone on, I should now have been world-famous and worshipped, and a multi-millionaire. But I am lonely and persecuted, and hold the last pieces of my maiden property in my hands."

She remained for a time immersed in her thoughts, and then broke out again—

"And why should I worry about it all? What have I to gain? I am ill and shall not live long. When I am dead it'll be all the same to me what is written on my tombstone. I do it for Siegfried's sake. And what thanks does he give me? When I ask him to spend a little less on his frivolous pleasures, he objects that it is his money that I have made over to Osterburg. Perhaps it would really be best to give up the game. I should at least have peace."

"I have thought that for a long time, your highness," agreed Bertha.

The maid's imprudent candour brought about a complete change in the baroness's mood. She sat straight up on the sofa, her eyes darted lightning at Bertha, and she exclaimed vehemently—

"Oh! so that's what you have thought for a long time, is it? But you've always said the contrary."

"But your highness, I have——"

"Hold your tongue, you serpent. You're a spy and

a traitor. Büchler at least shows me the letters she writes and receives. I know nothing of what you do. But I see clearly that you wish to discourage me. I am to bow down before the Grand Duke and my brother-in-law? What do they pay you for giving me such advice?"

"If your highness has such suspicions of me——" said Bertha, deeply offended.

"It is best that we should part, isn't it? Well, you can go when you like. The sooner the better."

"Very well, your highness. I will go," said Bertha.

"You have waited some time. Now you show yourself in your true colours. Naturally there's nothing to be got out of a poor, miserable widow."

That was too much for Bertha, who was convinced that she had made considerable sacrifices for the baroness during the past year and a half, and she burst into tears.

"Don't weep," said the baroness. "Tears are no longer of any avail with me. I shall only keep you until I have found a substitute. Go away out of my sight."

Bertha went. As soon as the baroness was alone, her anger vanished, she saw the consequences of her outbreak, and felt afraid, like a nervous child in the dark, What was to become of her if Bertha left her? How easy she had found it to announce her departure. That was her faithfulness, her dependence! No one was to be trusted. The baroness never thought for a moment that her own act was responsible for the breach. She hoped that Bertha would come to a sense of her bad conduct, and repent, and ask her pardon. But as dinner-time arrived and nothing of the sort had taken place, she became gloomier than ever, and really believed that the end of all things had come. She sent for her physician, who could do nothing except offer her some commonplace words of consolation, and then rang for the maid to inform her that she should not go down to dinner, that Siegfried could make what use he pleased of the box she had taken at the theatre, and that she must rest.

Bertha performed her duties silently and coldly. The

baroness could not endure that for long, and expressed her grief that any one who knew what her life was should be so hardhearted. A fresh discussion arose between them, the baroness humiliated herself, Bertha gave way, and when she had put her mistress to bed, the quarrel was ended by a gentle sermon from Bertha, and a correct apology from the baroness who could then sleep in peace.

Each day brought some fresh trouble. Little Coppée avenged himself for what seemed to him rank ingratitude in a cunningly spiteful fashion. Whenever he had occasion to mention the baroness's presence at a dinner, an 'at home,' or a private view, he printed her name as "Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Loewenstein-Franka," following it in brackets with 'Baroness von Gronendal.' It got so on her nerves that she began to refuse all invitations in order that she might not be named in the *Vercingetorix* in so offensive a way. But in the end she found herself unable to keep to that line of conduct. For if she systematically withdrew from society, she would soon be forgotten, she would lose all the relations with it that she still possessed, and she would render difficult, nay, even impossible, the realization of the plan from which she hoped salvation: a brilliant marriage for Siegfried. She must make her peace with Coppée. She could not employ either Count Laporte or the Dormans as intermediaries, for she did not wish to lay her wounds bare before them. The haughty and resentful young man took no notice of a letter of invitation to visit her. There was nothing left but to ask Madame Abeille to speak for her, a task she gladly undertook. Coppée declared his conditions. Long since the baroness had promised him a Diesa decoration. He desired that the promise should be redeemed, for he found that it was time for him to begin to make a start. How was the baroness to keep her word? She had counted on Prince Johann, but after the quarrel with Frau Flammert, she did not dare to approach him with a request. For she felt certain it would only result in further humiliation for her. Here, too, she lacked the

moral courage to recognize frankly that the Prince of Diesa had nothing more to offer her, there was no reconciliation with Coppée.

For similiar reasons the friendly relations between her and the actor, Saint-Denis, were threatened with a break. A decoration had likewise been promised to him, and the baroness could not keep her word. After a disagreeable discussion of the matter, Saint-Denis discontinued his visits to the Villa Josephine. This deprived her of a connection that had been of the greatest value. It had enabled her to recommend German plays sent her by ambitious writers, who were keen to see their work produced in Paris, to Saint-Denis, who invariably promised to take up the matter. So far nothing had come of it, but it permitted a vast amount of activity in building castles in the air. The baroness wrote cheerful letters to the dramatists, which mentioned the forthcoming production of their work in Paris; through Coppée information of a similar character was inserted in the *Vercingetorix* and other journals, so a few were made happy and many jealous. The legend of the baroness's decisive influence on the Parisian stage prevailed in German dramatic circles, and produced a far-reaching correspondence which flattered and consoled her, and gave her an importance in her own eyes, the loss of which caused her deep sorrow.

On one of the rare days when she dined alone with Siegfried she spoke of these things. She complained of the ingratitude and faithlessness of Coppée and Saint-Denis, and declared it was of importance for him to bring about a renewal of their former relations.

"You're not in earnest?" exclaimed Siegfried.

"Why not? The men are useful to us. It is to our interest to keep them in our circle," replied the baroness.

"I beg you pardon, mamma, but I have never been able to see that. They have never done anything for us worth speaking of, and never will, although meanwhile they'll get all they can out of us."

"Don't be so positive," said his mother, "you are inexperienced and know nothing of the ways of the world. Persons in our position cannot do without the press——"

"And comedians?"

"And comedians, too, as you contemptuously express it. You overlook the fact that through the comedians I hold the German writers, and, through them, the German press, in my hands."

"I certainly do overlook it, or, to be more accurate, I don't see it," retorted Siegfried. "What has come of the dozen pieces I have translated? Not one of them has been performed. Saint-Denis has led us by the nose, and we have led the authors by the nose. We have sacrificed our time, our money, and our dignity, and have gained nothing but hostility."

The baroness, quite taken aback, was silent. She had never seen things in that light. Neither did she desire to be deprived of her self-deception.

"Yes," she replied, in tones of irritation, "that's how you understand me. You can only doubt, and criticise, and deny. That won't bring us any farther."

"Neither will your methods, mamma. We shall never become Dukes of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level through the favour of the press. I consider that Osterburg has hit on the only right way. We must quietly await further developments. Let us take no heed of Coppée and Saint-Denis. Let us rejoice to be free of them."

But the baroness would not give in. "I can never count on you, not in the smallest thing!"

"Not in things which I consider entirely hopeless," Siegfried agreed.

"Don't irritate me?" she exclaimed angrily. "You always forget for whose sake I put up with all the agitation, persecution, and struggle. Is it for myself? I am becoming an old woman. I have done with life. For the few years more that God has, perhaps, allotted me, I should like peace. What would you say if I submitted to the family, and vanished into obscurity, and let you make your own way in the world as a mere baron?"

"I should say you were continuing what papa so affectionately began," replied Siegfried, grimly.

The baroness got up, and left the dining-room in silence. Siegfried let her go without stirring.

The uncomfortable surroundings at home made Nicoline's cheerful society a pressing need for Siegfried. The strained relations with his mother and all the human beings round him froze his heart, and his longing for warmth drove him almost unconsciously to seek it in Nicoline with the force and certainty of a natural impulse. They had agreed to meet every afternoon about half-past two in front of, or in the Église St. Augustin, which was near her house. For the gossip of her fellow-inmates about Siegfried's long daily visits which could not but come to her ears, annoyed her, despite her proud contempt for the opinion of persons she did not know and to whom she was entirely indifferent. She had fallen in with the plan in order to preserve her liberty of action. Siegfried was never to wait for her more than half an hour. If she was not there by then, she would not be coming. As a matter of fact in three weeks she had not missed going three times. As a rule the young people remained together till twilight. They visited everything that Paris afforded in the way of museums, galleries, and other sights. Siegfried was not a first-rate guide. He had little understanding for art, and insufficient culture to appreciate historical, scientific, or technical subjects, and was, in fact, only good as an excellent walker. They made expeditions to the outlying Jardin de Plantes, the Jardin d'Acclimatation, and the Bois de Vincennes. But, all the same, Nicoline was not often bored in his company. She had the feeling that he was her property, her chattel, and felt no more responsibility to him than she would have to some domestic pet or a piece of furniture.

They did not escape observation, either in the street or in the buildings. No one passed the couple without giving a pleased or envying and always surprised glance at the young giant and his beautiful and distinguished-looking companion. People often stopped and looked after them for quite a long time. Facts were not greatly perverted when they imagined themselves to be princes, who desired to go about unconventionally, like ordinary mortals, and that the people saw through

their incognito and followed them with respectful curiosity

If Nicoline hoped to escape the boarding-house gossip by meeting Siegfried away from it, she made a very natural mistake. The less she concerned herself with others, the more they concerned themselves with her. The only fellow-inmate, the landlady and her daughter excepted, with whom she was on confidential terms, was the American student. But she recoiled from her because her indiscretion annoyed her. The girl was vexed that Nicoline did not introduce Siegfried to her, and when she learned, from the chatter at Signora Conti's, who the visitor was, she boldly asked, "Dear Miss Flammert, won't you introduce the prince to me?"

"I will ask his highness if it would be agreeable to him," replied Nicoline, with cutting coldness; she left the room, and confined herself henceforth to the exchange of conventional greetings with the American.

It was a principle of the boarding-house only to take ladies. But exception was made in favour of three gentlemen. One was with his wife, another with his sister, and the third was a young Levantine, a distant relation of the landlady.

The Levantine was pursuing questionable studies in political and economic science at semi-public, semi-private institutions, with a view to a post in the diplomatic service of his native land. He dressed like a fashion model, and evidently considered himself an irresistible conqueror of women's hearts. He was not so much to be blamed for holding so good an opinion of himself, for it was justified by the success he had had with the young ladies who were his fellow-inmates during the year he had honoured the boarding-house with his presence.

Hardly had Nicoline become an inmate of the house than he took the utmost pains to approach her. He got the landlady to introduce him, and at once poured forth a shower of intrusive, eager compliments. Nicoline looked at him in astonishment, bowed slightly, turned and left him. Whenever she entered the dining-room, he greeted her warmly and respectfully, inquired after

her health, her studies, and tried to enter into conversation with her on the topics of the day. Nicoline was so annoyed that she determined not to go down until long after the gong had sounded. Then they would all be seated, and the Levantine would not be able to annoy her. But after a few days he arranged so that his place should be next hers. And thus her unpunctuality was useless. She had to endure his chatter. But not for long. When it availed nothing that she kept silent and did not listen to his insipid compliments, she remarked quite loud and in excellent French—

"Excuse me, sir, but I neither speak nor understand French."

Growing alternately red and white, he drew back, and made no reply. But at the same time he swore to be revenged for the repulse. He would not be the butt of the young ladies whom he had thoughtlessly begun to neglect on her account, and who had been glad witnesses of his discomfiture. She must be his, cost what it would.

What specially annoyed him was that he ascribed her rudeness to the existence of a rival. He did not believe her unapproachableness to be the result of virtue, but of some other tie. She repulsed him because she had another knight. Should he leave the field to him? Certainly not. He had no fear of Siegfried. He only reached to his shoulder, but he considered himself far handsomer and more elegant than he. His princedom made little impression on him, for he soon discovered how ambiguous it was, and he judged from his appearance that he was a melancholy, wooden-headed fool, in no respect to be compared with himself.

He had no doubt as to their relations, and he first set out to discover where the turtle-doves had their nest; then, after careful research into her pretty secret, he would go to her, and with oriental contempt for women, say, "Little one, don't play the prude any longer. I know this and that. I don't want to spoil sport, I only want to go shares." What did he risk? That she would fly into a passion? That was all the

same to him. That she would complain to her knight. Then there would be a conflict, and he would wrest his love away from him with mailed fist. He greatly prided himself on his skill in swordsmanship, and he would feel specially flattered if he inflicted a wound on the lanky, fair-haired German. And even if he could not attain his end by those means, he would have humiliated Nicoline and avenged himself on his favoured rival. If he could not triumph over Nicoline, that was the next best satisfaction.

He had a friend, a fellow-countryman who was exactly like himself. Nicoline had never seen him. He got him to dog her steps for several days. The result was disappointment. The voluntary spy informed him that Nicoline met her cavalier every day, but in a church, and that they then took a walk together, sometimes going into a museum, but never into a house; that they never drove together in a carriage or visited a *café* or restaurant. As a man of experience in such affairs, he assured his friend he might rely on him that there was nothing, or at least nothing yet, between the young couple; the cold-blooded German shuffled awkwardly along beside her, never touched her, or kissed her at meeting or parting, even when he could have done so without risk of observation. The connection was then in the early stages of hungry and thirsty courtship.

That information in some measure spoiled the Levantine's impudent plan, but not altogether. Nicoline's beauty intoxicated him more and more, and her cool contempt stirred his blood. Granted that she allowed her prince no privileges, that she was only selfishly playing with him, that relations with a person of his rank flattered her; what was there, then, so great about her? She was studying to be a singer just like any other conservatoire student. That sort of person was well enough known in Paris. She scarcely held a higher position than the little milliners for whom he waited of an evening at their shops or workrooms, and to whom he owed many delightful hours. In his expeditions after such game he had scarcely ever failed to attain his object. Why should

he not try his luck with this noble creature? Nothing venture, nothing have.

And he ventured. One afternoon he watched Nicoline out of the house, and when she began to take her way to the accustomed tryst, he approached her quickly, and lifting his hat, said, with a bow—

"Mademoiselle Flammert, may I venture to ask a few moments' conversation?"

Nicoline stood still in surprise, and following her unfortunate habit, turned very red. Great indignation overcame her, and her first impulse was to respond in anger. But she controlled herself by a great effort, looked at him scornfully, and said—

"You choose a strange time and place, sir. I can permit no conversation in the streets." With that she turned her back on him, and walked rapidly on.

His importunity was not damped by her repulse. He kept up with her, put on his hat, and whispered impertinently—

"Mademoiselle, you're not as severe with everybody as you are with me."

Nicoline stopped a second time, and said, with tremulous voice—

"If you don't leave me alone at once, I shall call a policeman."

That had its effect. He bowed and took himself off. She walked on quickly, though her knees trembled, and she was inwardly furious. His insinuation struck her like a dagger thrust. The man knew, then——? She did nothing that the whole world might not know. She was a girl alone in a strange city; she had a natural craving for companionship, for exchange of thoughts. Who could object to her harmless intercourse with a compatriot, a friend, a sort of relative? She reproached herself bitterly that she had not let Siegfried come and see her quietly every day. Certainly there was no room in the house where they could talk together free from interruption. But people might put an unpleasant interpretation on these half-stolen meetings with her friend, and get quite erroneous ideas into their heads. Nicoline did not dare

to look round. She tried to think that it was all the same to her if the shameless fellow did follow her. But the notion was extremely unpleasant.

"Let him dare!" she thought, and unconsciously clenched her small though strong hand. If the man followed her, so much the worse for him. Then she would tell Siegfried everything, and as to what happened after——

Painful thoughts surged up in her mind. No, she could not say anything to Siegfried. Why should she? The man had done her no harm. His last remark was offensive. Otherwise he had said nothing that could strictly be called insulting. He had been formally introduced to her. He had sat next her at table for weeks. He might not, perhaps, consider it improper to address her in the street. To desire a conversation is no crime, at the most it was a want of tact. She had some notion of what he intended to say. But she was not a child. She knew that it was difficult for girls to prevent men making love to them. Had she not excited herself unnecessarily? Would it not be best merely to laugh at the man's impertinence?

But at the bottom of her heart she felt no inclination to laugh. The fact remained, and she could not overlook it, that the man had intentions towards her, and had already been lacking in the respect due to her. Was she not therefore compelled to leave the boarding-house? It would be very tiresome; it would interfere with her habits; it meant trouble, expense, and loss of time, and might land her in even more objectionable surroundings. The impulse of comfort made her reject that solution. But at the same time other thoughts arose. She was alone at the boarding-house, and absolutely unprotected. For it was doubtful if the landlady, the servants, or her fellow-inmates would interfere if she was compelled to appeal to them. Anything might be expected of the man, even physical force. His importunity, both in the house and in the street, left no doubt of his bold impudence. It was imprudent to be quite unprepared.

A few minutes later she shook hands with Siegfried in the lobby of the Église St. Augustin. He found her silent, ill-humoured and irritable that afternoon. But

as a tender inquiry as to the cause of her mood was curtly turned aside, he avoided annoying her by importunate questioning. They had settled to walk to the Buttes-Chaumont whenever the weather should permit. The February day was dry, bright, and almost warm. But Nicoline surprised Siegfried with the proposal—

"I should so much like to see your shooting-gallery. Won't you take me there?"

"To my shooting-gallery? What an extraordinary idea!" replied Siegfried.

"Is it very unusual for ladies to go there?" asked Nicoline.

"Not at all. There are lady subscribers who go regularly," rejoined Siegfried.

"To look on or to shoot?"

"Both."

"Then," said Nicoline, "I should like to try. It's absurd not to know how to handle guns. In this age a lady ought to have that knowledge."

Siegfried made no further resistance, but took the way to the shooting-gallery. There the owner, the servants, and the guests treated him as a person of importance not only on account of his title, but also on account of his skill in shooting. His target, with the inscription, "His Highness Prince Siegfried von Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka," and the date, hung in a conspicuous place and excited the admiration of visitors.

Siegfried sent a dozen bullets into the black, and was glad that his friend should have the opportunity of admiring his infallibility, pistol in hand. Then he wanted to give her a Flobert carbine or a drawing-room pistol. Nicoline contemptuously refused both.

"No plaything, please, but a real weapon."

Siegfried was forced to obey. He reached down a target pistol, explained its mechanism to Nicoline, and entrusted it to her. She took aim bravely, did not quiver an eyelash at the report, and shot capitally. It vexed her that a small circle of spectators had formed round her. She shot again and again and the fifth time hit the target although in the last ring. She could not repress a

slight exclamation of delight and Siegfried said, "Bravo." Her zeal was not to be restrained, and she fired some thirty times, until her wrist was tired.

"You've had enough for to-day?" asked Siegfried.

"Let me rest a little," she replied, "and then I'll try with a revolver."

He knew that it was useless to contradict her when she took an idea into her head, and he waited patiently until she was ready to begin again. She soon mastered the revolver. She did not succeed in hitting the centre, but she handled the weapon with certainty.

She would not leave the shooting-gallery until it began to get dark—

"Come, Prince Siegfried. Now I'll go and buy a good revolver, and you can give me the benefit of your advice."

"I don't understand what has made you suddenly——"

"It's not necessary," said Nicoline; "only do what I ask you."

"If you must have a revolver, let me give you one. I inherited a whole collection of such things from my father," said Siegfried.

She considered a little, and then said firmly, "No, I prefer to buy one."

It was imprudent of her to ask his advice, for his taste and knowledge made him choose an excellent and exceedingly expensive weapon. When Nicoline heard the price she was a little frightened, hesitated, and remarked in a low tone that she had thought revolvers were much cheaper. Siegfried saw that he had made an absurd blunder. He hastened to repair his thoughtlessness. The price swallowed up the whole of her month's pocket-money, but it was possible.

"I may need it," said Nicoline, reproachfully, when the carefully packed revolver was delivered to her, and they prepared to leave the gunmaker's shop.

"Have you a campaign in view?" asked Siegfried, half wondering, half amused, while the shopman handed her a box of cartridges.

"Perhaps," she answered enigmatically, without smiling.

When, some three hours later, she entered the dining-room, the whole company was as usual seated at table. The Levantine occupied his accustomed place. The greeting with which he acknowledged the general bow she gave resembled that of all other days, and he seemed entirely unembarrassed. She was filled with deep disgust. What a low nature a man must possess who could calmly look a lady in the face, who a few hours earlier had threatened him with a policeman. Any kind of wickedness might be expected from such a creature. During the meal she felt more estranged from her surroundings than ever, and kept thinking that the neighbourhood of this man would make it too uncomfortable for her to remain in the house, and how disgraceful it was that such a shameless rascal should have it in his power to interfere with her peace, while she was unable to do anything against him.

She was too full of the events of the day, and too frank towards her mother not to make some allusion to what was filling her mind.

"Do you know, mummy," she wrote, among other things, "directly I am independent, I shall not live at an hotel or boarding-house. It is intolerable to be stared at by strangers. Of course I shall be stared at in the theatre, but then they will have paid for the privilege." And further on, she said, "I like being in Paris, and take pleasure in my work, in the town, in everything I see, learn, or experience. But I wish my studies were finished, so that I could be with you again, at least, for a time. For this boarding-house life, this semi-intercourse, this demi-semi-confidence with the most ordinary people, begins to be unendurable."

Before she went to bed, she played a little with her revolver, and laid it quite proudly on the table by her side.

"Now, let me catch you," she thought, and blew out her candle.

The next day, after luncheon, she lay on her sofa, reading, when there came a low knock at the door. She thought it was the housemaid, and called out unsuspiciously, without changing her attitude—

"Come in!"

The door opened, and the Levantine stood before her. He closed it behind him, and came quickly towards her. Nicoline felt all the blood rush to her heart. She stood up, and exclaimed in a hoarse voice—

"What do you mean? Leave my room at once."

"You called out, 'Come in,' and I accepted your invitation. Let us talk together in a reasonable fashion."

"Once more leave my room, or I shall call some one," replied Nicoline.

"Don't trouble yourself, mademoiselle; every one is out, except the maids, and they are busy in the kitchen. I must speak to you, do you hear? I must. You escaped me in the street, there's no opportunity in the drawing-room, it must be here. Mademoiselle, I love you——"

"Not another word! I warn you. Your life is at stake! I will not listen to you."

"You must listen to me. If necessary, I'll force you to. Your threat doesn't alarm me. I quite understand. You'll complain. You'll send your friend to me. I laugh at the idea. You're in my power now."

He darted to the door and bolted it. Then he went determinedly up to Nicoline, and made as if to embrace her.

Nicoline's confusion only lasted for a moment. She found the situation more humiliating than dangerous, and soon regained her composure. When the Levantine bolted the door, quick as lightning she flew to the table by her bed, hastily pulled open the drawer, snatched up the loaded revolver, and suddenly turned on the Levantine, who was holding his hand towards her.

"Back, or I shoot!"

In surprise, he drew back from the shining barrel. She used the brief instant to hurry past the intruder to the door, and to reach the bolt. But he did not give her time. In the twinkling of an eye, he was at her side, and tried to get possession of the revolver. Nicoline dealt him a violent blow with her clenched left hand, and took aim with the right. He uttered a low cry of rage, and tried to rush upon her. She fired. He drew

back, pushed up his sleeve, and saw that shirt and arm were covered in blood. The bullet had gone through his forearm and had driven a hole in the wall over the bed.

While he was occupied with his wound, Nicoline succeeded in pushing back the bolt; she opened the door and stepped into the passage. Then she said to the Levantine, who was gazing at his bleeding arm—

"Go, and get it bound up."

He came slowly out, threw a murderous glance at her, and murmured—

"You shall pay for this."

"Willingly. There are plenty more bullets ready for you."

He said no more, but with downcast head went to his room, which was at the corner of the passage.

Nicoline went back into her room, bolted the door, refilled the empty chamber of the revolver, and sat down.

"My mother," she thought, "would have been terrified if she had witnessed this quarrel, but my father would have been pleased with me."

Her first feeling was one of triumph that she owed her deliverance to her own determination. But gentler feelings soon stirred in her. Perhaps she ought to have assisted the monster. Was he in pain? The wound did not seem to be dangerous. It was only a punishment he well deserved. Certainly, it might have ended differently. If she had wounded him dangerously, or if she had killed him? If a corpse had now been lying in her room? A shudder ran through her at the idea. Disagreeable pictures presented themselves before her eyes. People rushing in—shrieks—confusion—the police—examination—legal proceedings. She knew, however, she would have had nothing to fear. She had only acted in self-defence. There was no jury in the two hemispheres that would not have acquitted her, and congratulated her on preserving her honour. But the vexation! the excitement! The fierce light of publicity! Horrible! And yet it could not be avoided. Was it not terrible that a girl should be exposed to such an adventure? Yes, and a thousand times

yes. She had acted rightly. Such examples were necessary and useful. If only a hundred, perhaps even a dozen, intemperate men found their impertinence punished by a pistol bullet, then, perhaps, a woman would be able to live as safely as a man amid our boasted morality. And who was to give the necessary example if not the courageous and strong of her own sex.

Her glance fell on the hole in the wall, and the idea came into her head to find the bullet, and keep it as a remembrance. She did not have to search long before she saw it on the quilt of her bed. It was quite flattened out, much torn, and hacked into the shape of a star. With a little imagination, it might be regarded as a battered decoration.

"My first war medal," said Nicoline, aloud, as she wrapped it in paper, and put it in her purse.

Reaction now followed on the inward excitement, which, despite the outward calm had been very great, and she felt terribly depressed. She struggled with the tears that would rise. She longed for her mother. She was too lonely! Then, for the first time, she thought of Siegfried. How strange that he should have entirely vanished from her mind when excitement had been running so high in her! He would already be waiting for her. It was almost the time for their meeting. Should she go? And tell him what had happened? Impossible. To keep silent over it? That would not do. What should she do? What should she decide?

And the future! She could not remain in the boarding-house unless the man took himself off of his own accord. Should she wait until he left the house? or should she forestall him? The shot did not seem to have been heard. The report had not been very loud. But the hole in the wall—that could not escape the housemaid's notice. Should she say that the pistol had gone off by accident? The lie was repugnant to her. To say nothing at all? Would that be best? Perhaps the man's wound would betray her. The secret was in his keeping. He was a relative of the landlady. She did not know if they were on confidential terms. Her reason

told her that she should tell the landlady of the affair, and put herself under her protection. She did not, however, like the idea of such a proceeding. She came to no decision.

She prepared to go and meet Siegfried. She made a great effort to seem calm, and believed that she was a miracle of self-control. But at the first glance Siegfried saw that something unusual had happened, and almost before he had greeted her, asked anxiously—

"You're not ill, Nicoline?"

"Oh no. I should not have come then."

"What is it, then! Has anything unpleasant happened to you," he demanded.

She looked astonished. "What makes you think that?"

"But, Nicoline, do you think I'm blind, or indifferent, which would be worse?"

"You see ghosts," replied Nicoline, crossly. Her tone gave him no encouragement to insist on a plain answer. Siegfried bowed slightly, and they walked along the Boulevard Malesherbes in silence.

Where the Boulevard Haussmann crosses it, Siegfried asked—

"Where shall we go? To shoot again?"

"No," exclaimed Nicoline, so loudly that two working-women, who were passing, looked at her in astonishment.

"Then, where?" inquired Siegfried, in a low tone.

"I can't walk about to-day," said Nicoline, ashamed of her vehemence, "I must sit down."

"Shall we go to the Louvre?"

"That's too far. Let us take the boat at the Place de la Concorde."

When they had taken their places on the deck of the Seine steamer going to the Pont d'Austerlitz, Siegfried began to tell a story of a political adventurer whom Madame Abeille, with her usual pretended importance, had introduced to his mother, a circumstance that would probably lead once again to some imprudent act. Suddenly he broke off in his narrative, and said—

"You're not listening."

"Forgive me, Prince Siegfried, I am considering whether I ought not to look for another boarding-house."

"Really! why?" he asked.

Nicoline hesitated.

"You seem quite comfortable there," said Siegfried. "What has made you change your opinion so suddenly? Is the food bad?"

"No, it's not that," she replied.

"What, then?"

"There are importunate people there, and I cannot live in the same house with them."

Siegfried listened attentively. "Importunate people! Who are they?"

"A man, a relative of the landlady, a Turkish diplomatist, or something of the kind," replied Nicoline.

"Oh, the little greasy dark man with the piercing eyes. I noticed the fellow. Has he dared to annoy you?"

"Yes," she replied.

"And what has he done?"

"What that kind of person always does; said pretty things, paid me attention."

"And therefore you must leave the house instead of sending the impertinent fellow about his business?" exclaimed Siegfried.

Nicoline was silent.

"Nicoline, you are concealing something from me. I've no right perhaps to force your confidence, but it pains me to be shut out from it."

He said that in so sorrowful and sincere a tone, that Nicoline felt her reserve vanish, and told everything, the attempts to approach her, the conversation in the street, up to the insolent knocking at her door. She said nothing of the intrusion into her room and its consequences.

Siegfried's face seemed to turn to stone while he listened. His eyes and mouth assumed an alarmingly angry expression, such as the faces of his distant ancestors might have had when they gave the command for captive enemies to be impaled or flayed alive.

"The fellow shan't get off like that. I shall challenge him and shoot him dead," he declared.

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Nicoline.

"I shall do it, whether you like it or not."

"He is already punished," escaped her; and then she told the rest.

Siegfried shook his head. "You acted as I should have expected, but it's not enough. With only a slight flesh wound he'll begin all over again to-morrow. He has forfeited his life."

"I beg your pardon, but what right have you to call the man out?" asked Nicoline.

"What right! I think——"

"According to my knowledge," interrupted Nicoline, "only a near relative or a husband can defend a lady. Any other knight compromises her."

"You have forgotten a third contingency," Siegfried reminded her.

"Which?"

"A *fiancé*," said Siegfried, softly, without looking at her.

Nicoline turned crimson. "You're not my *fiancé*."

"You have only to wish it, and I am."

A long silence ensued. At length Nicoline collected herself.

"Siegfried," she said, in a low voice, to which, despite superhuman efforts, she could give no firmness, "I shall be grateful to you till my last breath——"

"Grateful?" interrupted Siegfried, with unusual animation. "It is I who will be eternally grateful to you if you will make me so happy."

"Let me finish," she replied, with some impatience. "I did not mean it like that. I owe no one thanks for wooing me. I'm good enough for any one. But I am grateful to you that you have never come to me with protestations of love, although you care for me——"

"Oh, how much!" he murmured, and tried to take her hand.

She pressed his slightly, and let it go again. "That was splendid of you. There your race spoke. And mine.

It made it possible for me to meet you without embarrassment. Siegfried, let it go on the same."

"A refusal?"

"No," she said, with animation, "you mustn't take it so. We are good friends—good, true, and close friends." She accompanied each epithet with a glance from her blue eyes that set his heart beating wildly. "Nothing will be changed. No formal engagement as yet. No smooth path lies in front of either of us. We shall have to work very energetically to reach success. We must not hinder or cripple each other. We must march separate, in order, perhaps, one day to strike a blow together. I've all sorts of things in my head. But I'm not going to talk. Only this: the first to reach the goal shall stretch out his hand to the other. You agree?"

"I don't exactly understand. I only know that you refuse me," declared Siegfried.

"But I don't, Siegfried," asserted Nicoline. "I only consider it prudent for us not to bind ourselves at once."

"I have bound myself. Only when you violently tear the bond asunder shall I believe in the freedom I don't want, and with which I'll have nothing to do."

"In that case, everything is right once more: we must both be outwardly free. How you regard our relations from within is your affair. You must arrange that with yourself. I shall do the same. Let us live, let us fight; perhaps we shall conquer."

"I should be more likely to do that with you than without you."

She shook her head.

"I know," he continued, "that at present I've nothing to offer you. I don't even know what name I could give you as my wife——"

"Siegfried, do you think I'm acting from worldly motives, that I won't take you until you can make me a duchess? Do you believe that?" Nicoline asked.

Siegfried made a slight uncertain movement of his hand.

"You hurt me." She moved a little away and looked at the river and the banks slowly gliding by.

"But, Nicoline, it's no reproach to you. It's natural that you should take into consideration, in such ambiguous circumstances——"

"Not another word. You don't understand."

"Then," he implored humbly, "explain more clearly."

"Whether you are prince or baron is all the same to me. I only want you to attain some fixed plan of life. If you can one day say, 'I have compelled the family to my will, they have given me a place among them,' then all will be right. But if you say, 'The struggle is useless, I give it up, I will stand as Baron von Gronendal,' that will also be right. That is also a solution, and, to my taste, not the worst one, provided that Baron von Gronendal signifies what I imagine. In the one case as in the other, you can come to me and ask, 'Does our compact still hold?'"

"Meanwhile, you've had a hundred occasions to lose your heart——"

"Siegfried, do you know me so little?"

"You will be free. For I've no claim on you, and dare not complain if you——"

"I repeat," she rejoined, "that we shall be outwardly free. But I am sure of myself. You are bound in no way. Whenever you come to me again, you'll always find me free. I will not betroth myself to you. I cannot and will not betroth myself to another. For a while I must live only for my art. That excludes all frivolities and distractions. I only ask you to promise me one thing: if you change your mind, if you think your life's happiness lies elsewhere, I must be the first to be told."

"You attribute such inconstancy to me?"

"I attribute nothing to you. I only want you to feel really free. But you must take on yourself this burden: I demand your formal promise that you will let me know should you choose elsewhere."

"I can easily promise that; it's quite possible I may die, but it's impossible that it should come to that. May I now ask the same on my part?"

Nicoline smiled. "You may. But I say, like you, the promise is needless."

The boat had reached the Pont d'Austerlitz. Nicoline wanted to go back without leaving the landing-stage. Her love-affairs which she had felt to be a great event in her life, had driven what lay nearest out of her mind. Siegfried was the first to return from dreamland to the firm ground of reality.

"But, for all this, I can't let the fellow off so easily."

"I think he's sufficiently punished," said Nicoline. "You must promise me to leave him in peace."

"That is hard," declared Siegfried.

"But consider, Siegfried, how can you interfere in a thing of the kind?"

"Yes, yes; but, on the other hand, it would be too comfortable if every low fellow was safe from punishment for his rascalities. I'm in a foreign land here. That makes it easier for me."

"I will not have it, Siegfried. I know that your pistol is infallible. Let me have the consciousness that this wretch's life is in my hands and that I give it him. Then I'm no longer a girl that a scamp has insulted. I'm a Semiramis or a Catherine against whom a slave has offended. I can have him killed, or exercise mercy according to my humour. It pleases me to be merciful."

"You're really a royal creature," said Siegfried, in a tone of such reverence that Nicoline smiled; but she was secretly glad that he expressed what she herself felt. "But there's still the tiresome question of the boarding-house."

"Yes, that's very bothering. If the man doesn't go, isn't already gone, I must move. The search—and my mother—I must explain to her why I leave—and that'll put ideas into her head and worry her—there's the unpleasant, prosaic dregs of a romantic potion."

"I think I had better go back with you. You never can tell——"

She considered a little. "No," she said, "I had better tell Signora Conti everything. She will advise me what I had better do."

She parted from Siegfried at the Place de la Concorde,

but promised to let him know by express letter in the evening what further took place.

When she appeared at such an unusual hour at her singing mistress's, the signora imagined some unpleasant business, despite Nicoline's calm, almost cheerful demeanour. She at once left her class and took Nicoline into a small drawing-room, and asked—

"What's wrong now?"

Nicoline told her afternoon's adventure briefly, and with almost brutal candour.

"But, Nicoline," exclaimed Signora Conti, in horror. "To shoot at him! You're a dangerous person!"

"What ought I to have done?"

"Ring! Call! At most a box on the ears!"

"I think a bullet's cleaner."

The teacher shook her head. "Nicoline, Nicoline, you're the heroine of too many tales. You must put an end to it."

"Is it my fault?" asked Nicoline, offended.

"I did not say that. It's a misfortune, if you like; but believe me, my child, keep a guard over yourself. I mean well by you."

She did mean well by her. Nicoline developed exactly as her teacher desired, and she took her more carefully and lovingly under her protection. She did not put great faith in her virtue. Thirty years' activity in a profession which brought her into contact with thousands of young women preparing to be singers, made her indulgent. She knew Frau Flammert's life, and accepted the fact that the fruit does not fall far from the tree. Besides, she did not concern herself greatly with her pupils' way of life, so long as they gave her no annoyance. That she knew how to avoid. If pupils to whom she was indifferent committed faults, and became talked about, she expelled them from her classes. But, with a star like Nicoline, there could be no question of that. In such a case the evil must be prevented, adjusted, hushed up.

Signora Conti commissioned her husband to accompany Nicoline back to the boarding-house, and to be ready to assist her. A strikingly dignified and handsome man,

he looked after the social relations of the house. He did it admirably, and in such splendid style, that he associated with ministers and ambassadors on a footing of equality, and had relations with all the most distinguished persons in Paris.

Arrived at the boarding-house, Signor Conti asked that the landlady should be summoned to the drawing-room. Refusing her invitation to sit down with the gesture of a great man, and stretching himself to his full height, he informed the landlady briefly, and in a commanding tone, of the insult her boarder had received under her roof, and asked if she was prepared to give Nicoline satisfaction, and turn the evil-doer out of the house without delay.

"Poor fellow!" murmured the landlady, quite cast down. "I've always thought his gallantry would play him a bad turn one of these days. It was imprudent of me to have him here." The masterful, tall man, with the short grey beard, and the decoration in his buttonhole, overawed her. She saw herself summoned to the police court, the reputation of her house and her means of livelihood gone, and became so excited that she rushed up to Nicoline, who had not opened her mouth, kissed her hand, asked her pardon, and agreed that her cousin—the relationship was so distant, so little—should leave the house at once.

The landlady carried out her promise with great decision. But not without some stormy recrimination, through which the servants and of course the boarders came to the knowledge of every detail.

When the dinner-bell rang, Nicoline went haughtily into the dining-room. She had determined to go back again if the Levantine was still there. But he was not there, and his place had disappeared. In her place lay, for the time of year, a magnificent bouquet; as she entered she received a low bravo and subdued applause from the ladies, and her American fellow-pupil said aloud with her foreign accent, "I have always admired you as an artist. Now I admire you as a brave woman. I have never been so proud to call you my friend as I am to-day."

BOOK IV

In her impatience to reap some advantage from her sacrifice, the baroness wrote to Dr. von Osterburg every day, and demanded over and over again that he should send her daily reports of the progress of her affairs. Osterburg met her restlessness with a stoical calm. For a dozen of her letters he sent one answer, which was distinguished by respectful brevity, and made no allusion to the eleven he had consigned to the waste-paper basket, often emphasized as they were by telegrams like trumpet blasts.

But he kept her punctually informed of all he undertook. The affair went on stroke by stroke. The directors of the Land Register refused to admit her Royal Highness, the Princess Josephine of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level, as owner of the portion of the house that had been purchased, and demanded a proof that the purchaser was entitled to bear that name and title. Osterburg offered his client's marriage-certificate as a proof. The directors pronounced that testimony insufficient, declined to change that view, and left it to the lawyer for the prosecution to contest the decision in the superior court. That authority demanded a testimony from the head of the Austrian line of Loewenstein-Level, or from the reigning Grand Duke of Loewenstein and Franka that the mover in the affair was a member of the Grand Ducal house. Osterburg protested against the demand. He showed it to be contrary to the law, and strove that the supreme court should declare itself incompetent, since the reigning house and those houses connected with it, could not take cases before the ordinary courts, but had a special court in the Lord Chamberlain's office.

Osterburg declared that the Austrian house of Loewenstein-Franka shared the privilege of the special court. The ministry of the Imperial house certified that members of the Austrian line of that family were to be regarded and treated as relations of the Imperial house.

It will be clear that all these proceedings and counter-proceedings were not accomplished in a day.

Although the courts and authorities participating in the affair acted with astonishing rapidity, and accomplished in weeks, often in days, what might easily have taken months, and although there was no opening for complaints of delay or dilatoriness, time had gone forward, and April had arrived.

The beginning of the quarter brought Osterburg's account. The sight of it brought the tears to the baroness's eyes. Not only was there no surplus, but she owed some hundred gulden. Luckily her brother-in-law paid her allowance on April 1st. Out of that Osterburg was able to pay the rest of the money due for the house, and the current expenses of the lawsuit. The small sum that remained over he kept as an advance for future outlays.

How were things to go on? How was she to keep her head above water until the result of the Vienna campaign was decided? Nothing was coming in for the moment. Her ready money had been absorbed in the unlucky, if doubtless necessary, purchase of the house in Vienna, or at least locked up there for an inconceivable time. She had debts for which she had pawned the most valuable part of her jewels. Necessaries began to fail in the house. The servants' wages were not paid regularly. Her brother's annuity was not forthcoming. Since she could not altogether cease her gifts to actors and others, she was again deeply in debt with the jewellers. That did not much trouble her, since it was an aristocratic obligation. On the other hand, she loathed the little common debts to greengrocers and coal-merchants, a mob of poor creatures who, because they were her creditors, had the right of pulling her bell, of talking in a rough, loud voice in her hall, and making her talked about by

the neighbours. But she must irrevocably come to it now.

But it should not come to it, not at any price. She determined to exhaust every possible resource first. She mortgaged the Villa Josephine for as high a sum as was to be obtained. She shed plenty of tears before she could decide to entrust her lawyer with the business. She felt like a ruler who was giving up all claim to his throne, or who was forced to let his crown be annexed by some stronger power. Mortgaging her house procured her the means of going on for another year. In that time she must either get safely into harbour or perish. If by that time she had not come to an understanding with the family, or if Siegfried had not married a wealthy heiress, there was no way out. At least she saw none, although she discussed the matter with Bertha with morbid persistence.

In her bitterness of spirit she hatched the most marvellous schemes for putting pressure on the family. That such methods meant blackmail, she either did not know or would not confess. She thought of writing her memoirs, and of relating therein all the Court scandal of the last thirty years with which she was naturally intimately acquainted. An authoress whose indifferent novel she had introduced to Madame Abeille in Siegfried's translation was to help her. The lady had shown her gratitude for that service by writing an article for an important German paper under the title of "A German Prince's Home in Paris," in which she described the Princess Albrecht of Loewenstein's "palace," her "receptions," her daily life, not without a fantastic mingling of truth and fiction. The article was much disliked by the Courts it concerned, and a semi-official despatch was sent to the paper in which it unfortunately appeared that "no widowed Princess Albrecht of Loewenstein existed." That gave the baroness the idea that she could later employ the authoress as her collaborator in the composition of a volume of reminiscences that would have a stronger effect on the Courts than a newspaper article.

Another time she considered whether she should not

take up her art again, and come forward as a virtuoso and actress. She could not of course play the parts that had been written for her in her youth, for singing and dancing were no longer in her power. But that was not now essential. The chief thing was that in the great cities of both hemispheres enormous placards adorned with royal arms should announce, "This evening in X—— Theatre, first appearance of her Royal Highness, the Princess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level." The family could not possibly long stand out against such tactics. And even if it did not bring about a treaty of peace, such a tour would, at any rate, bring in money.

Then it occurred to her that if the worst came to the worst, she might "marry a rich old Jew," and so revenge herself on the family that way. She had often heard at Court the most aristocratic noblemen, when they were in difficulties, sadly or seriously threaten, if they were not helped, "to marry a rich Jewess," and she so little understood the meaning of the threat, that she seriously believed that rich old Jews would be as desirous of her as rich young Jewesses of a prince.

A curious episode in the domestic politics of France gave the baroness's restless mind a new direction for a few weeks.

General Ménard, a frivolous, stupid place-hunter, had, by means of his eloquence at public meetings, so ingratiated himself with the leaders of the Left, that they imagined they had discovered the phœnix, or that *rara avis*—a general who was a radical. He was advanced to the highest posts, and he used his position to turn the heads of the populace with his personal popularity by the coarsest means. His patrons soon saw him in his true light, and dismissed him from his offices with as little ceremony as they had put him into them. But it was too late. General Ménard had become a power in the State. He had numerous adherents both in the administration and among the people. Those who were discontented or greedy of gain gathered round him. Here he promised promotion, there vengeance, fresh military glory and greatness of the fatherland; he made some believe that

he was in France and elsewhere the soldier of the Church; he gave others to understand that he would cut the throat of the Republic and set up the monarchy again.

General Ménard was surrounded by a court of extravagant, self-important, and foolish women, who were fanatical enemies of democracy. His advisers were as ignorant of the general trend of circumstances as he was, and vied with him in forming phantoms of the brain, the childish stupidity of which excited the unbounded astonishment of reasonable men.

Madame Abeille was one of his most confidential friends, for she put her weekly paper, her drawing-room, her personal influence unconditionally at his service. She thought herself a diplomatic genius, and dreamed of playing an historic *rôle* as Madame de Staël, Frau von Krüdener, and the Princess Lieven had done in different lands and at different periods. A wonderful plan occurred to her, for the execution of which she relied chiefly on her friend, the baroness.

She rushed into the Villa Josephine one day like a whirlwind, and after the first greetings, said—

"My dear princess, General Ménard has the greatest desire to be introduced to you. May I bring him to see you?"

"General Ménard!" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes. He is one of my greatest friends, and it seems to me unnatural that you should not know each other," replied Madame Abeille.

"Your friends are my friends. You must both come and dine to-morrow evening. I don't know whom else to invite——"

"No one," interrupted Madame Abeille, quickly. "I want you to get to know each other, and that is easiest among a few people. Just we three and, of course, Prince Siegfried. Don't you agree?"

"Isn't that presumptuous? The general is such a famous man. Everything's at his feet. It is hardly possible that he'll care for a poor thing like me," suggested the baroness.

"Only a truly great lady could be so modest. The

general will understand how to value such an honour. It's settled, then?" said Madame Abeille.

"Yes; it's settled," agreed the baroness.

The next evening the general sent an enormous and, for that season of the year, a very costly bouquet, composed of his favourite flowers and hers—tea roses and red carnations—and made his appearance with military punctuality at half-past seven. Three peals of the bell announced his entrance into the garden, Siegfried met him at the bottom of the steps leading to the front door, Janusz set open both wings of the drawing-room door, and the baroness, painted, powdered, and adorned with all the jewels that remained to her, leaning on her gold-mounted stick, met him on the threshold. His bouquet stood on the console table under the life-size portrait of Prince Albrecht.

The general was in evening dress, and wore the star of a grand officer of the Legion of Honour. He was a tall, thin, young-looking man, with a coquettish black moustache and tuft on his under lip, and close-cut bristly dark hair. A short roundish nose made his face remarkably insignificant, and he vainly tried to give his brown eyes an eagle-like glance, but they kept a somewhat childlike simple expression when they were not observing keenly.

He gallantly kissed the baroness's hand, and uttered some complimentary phrases. He had been primed beforehand by Madame Abeille, and spoke with respect of the greatness of the house of Meissen and of its renown in war and peace. The baroness replied by congratulating him on his unexampled political success, and expressed her conviction that he was destined to renew the glory of France, and lead her to a brilliant fate.

The conversation took a similar tone at dinner. General Ménard told of his campaigns, of his sojourn in Germany, of his acquaintances among the princely families there and in other countries, and the baroness gave her reminiscences of the courts of Vienna, Franka, and Diesa. The general asked incidentally about the Grand Duke Hilarius, the Queen of Gotheim, the Queen of Atlantis and Hageland, and the baroness gladly expatiated on their affairs, showed

how intimately she was acquainted with them, and always mentioned them as her aunt, her cousin, her brother-in-law. The general observed, apparently by the way, that she must certainly know the Emperor William, and she confirmed the supposition. As a prince he had often been at Franka, and had visited her at Castle Lindenheim. Since his accession to the throne she had only seen him once.

"And how do you stand with his Majesty, your highness?" asked the general.

"That is difficult to say, general. You probably know that I am not on terms with a portion of my family——"

The general nodded.

"And that injures my relations with the Kaiser, who is very fond of the Grand Duke Hilarius."

"But you can approach his Majesty?" the general inquired.

"Undoubtedly," she answered. "I have had no occasion to do so of late, but the Kaiser is a chivalrous man, and I am convinced that he would not show himself less amiable to the widow who is treated so unworthily and unkindly than he was in happier days to his cousin, Prince Albrecht's wife."

Apparently that was what the general wanted to know. He now drew the silent Siegfried into the conversation, and laid himself out to attract him as he had already enchanted the baroness. It was not easy, for he was not sympathetic to Siegfried, who was annoyed to hear his mother speak of her connections in a manner which an ill-natured critic would characterize as a falsification of facts. He was, however, polite, and less reserved than usual.

At a sign from Madame Abeille, as soon as they had taken their coffee in the drawing-room, the general said—

"Your highness, I am acquainted with your habits through our mutual friend, and I beg you not to alter them for me."

"It is true, general, that, as a rule, I retire early, my

health is so bad. But when I have the honour of entertaining so celebrated a soldier for the first time, I may allow myself to make an exception."

"You must not do that, princess," said Madame Abeille. "We've so many other things to discuss that we should not any way have time for them, so that, with your permission, we'll come soon again."

"Whenever you like, my dear friend, whenever you like," said the baroness.

The farewell was most cordial, the general was accompanied to his carriage with the same ceremony as on his arrival, and when he had gone, the baroness discussed him with Siegfried. What a distinguished man! What a delightful talker! What an amiable disposition! He was as attractive as Napoleon and Gambetta together! How lucky France was! At each turning-point of her history she was provided with a man for her protector and her saviour as by a miracle. She overflowed with affection for Madame Abeille, who had shown herself a true friend in introducing the general to her. Relations with a man who would probably be the head of the State tomorrow, or who might be next in succession to the throne would be most valuable to her.

Siegfried endured his mother's enthusiasm, but, as usual, was himself unmoved. He put no faith in the general's star.

The next morning a servant came from Madame Abeille with a letter, asking if she could receive the general at three o'clock that afternoon; he had things of the greatest importance to discuss with her, but wished to know first if she felt equal to such an interview. The baroness answered in the affirmative, and looked forward to the visit with great excitement.

She again received her guests in the drawing-room on the ground-floor. Madame Abeille asked immediately—

"Princess, are we quite safe from eavesdroppers here? We have to discuss things that require the strictest secrecy."

That made the baroness so curious that she found it

difficult to preserve her composure. She took Madame Abeille and the general up to her boudoir, threw open the two doors, one of which led into her bedroom, the other into the linen closet, and remarked—

"As you see, the rooms on both sides are empty. No one can spy on us here."

Madame Abeille was the first to begin. "May I venture, general, to speak first?"

General Ménard bowed his consent.

"I won't waste time beating about the bush, but plunge at once into the heart of the matter. We have not concealed from you that the general has great plans and perfect confidence in the future. He is not even afraid of war. A man of his temperament would rather attain his ends by an appeal to arms than by peaceful negotiations. But we are dealing with a pusillanimous set of people. The general's programme contains, as the first item, the reacquisition of the lost provinces. He can only realize his projects if he has power in his hands, and the surest way to obtain it is to restore the lost provinces to his country. You follow me, princess, I hope?"

"Of course I follow you," replied the baroness, with animation. She listened, however, with the greatest astonishment, and vainly sought to guess how these high political questions could concern her.

"You see, princess," continued Madame Abeille, "that it is most necessary that the general should be successful in this important matter. Then France will lie at his feet. But it is you alone who can help him to success."

"I?" exclaimed the baroness.

"You, your highness," interposed the general. His pleasant baritone took a deeper note, and trembled pathetically. "You see, your highness, the welfare and peace of the globe, of humanity, depend on the Alsace-Lorraine question being wiped off the face of the earth. Most probably it will be done by the sword. I confess that is what I should prefer. But perhaps war can be prevented. If a peaceful settlement is possible, we shall be

content with the restoration of French Lorraine, and the neutralization of the rest. But you will readily understand that the matter cannot be brought forward officially. It must be worked in unofficial ways. Now, we have no one whom we can commission or ask to undertake an interview in Berlin in the right quarter in an unprejudiced and irresponsible fashion."

The general paused. The baroness held her breath. The hissing of the wood in the stove could be heard.

"Ah, your highness," he continued more emphatically "if only you would be the angel of peace, the good genius of two great nations, of the whole of mankind! Your Kaiser is a talented and chivalrous man. Great intentions and world-embracing plans are ascribed to him. Maybe, he suffers under the situation which he did not create, which he found ready to his hand, as much as we do; he has, perhaps, the same secret wishes as we have, and sees just as little the way to communicate with us as we do with him. You have the honour to know his Majesty. You are received by him. How splendid it would be if you could say to his Majesty: Sire, there is a large party in France ready for reconciliation and for friendship with Germany, if only she will restore a small portion of the Lorraine territory, and make the rest into a Luxembourg or a Switzerland. France will pay the necessary milliards. Germany needs colonies; France possesses great tracts of land across the seas for which she has little use, she would share her surplus with Germany. The two nations, united, would have irresistible power; they could destroy England's sea-power, and humiliate her pride. They would defend Europe against the threatening American danger, and with Russia's co-operation they would make Asia and Africa of use to them. A new epoch of the world's history would begin. Such a great deed would secure for all who had helped towards its accomplishment, fame, immortality, and the eternal gratitude of humanity."

Madame Abeille had listened with shining eyes, and had drunk in the general's well-chosen sentences, spoken with all an actor's talent, words which she well knew

were not originated in the general's mind. She could no longer control her excitement, and interposed—

"What a *rôle* for you, princess. I am quite overcome when I think of it. It is the noblest task that could be assigned to a woman. To establish peace, to prevent bloodshed, to disarm noble armed hands, and to place them one in the other! Ah, my friend!" And she threw her arms round the baroness, while the tears streamed from her eyes. The baroness herself, was very near weeping, and felt her eyelids grow wet. It was all most touching.

"It is a magnificent outlook, general," stammered the baroness. "But I don't quite see how I—yes, if my angel prince was still alive—but since his death my influence——"

"That's not the point," the general broke in, too eager to be polite. "What has influence to do with it? You will be believed if you say: I am only repeating the words of Frenchmen who are prepared and able to carry out all they promise. The one thing needful is that these words shall reach his Majesty's ear without our being formally responsible, and that we may learn with certainty what his Majesty replies to the overture. His Majesty can be quite candid with a member of a German reigning family. If nothing comes of your communication, well, then, good! we have gained nothing. The refusal may take a harsh form, but, even so, we cannot be offended; a conversation between his Majesty and a German relative does not affect us. If his Majesty favours your communication, then, your highness, your *rôle* is ended, the rest is a matter for fully empowered negotiators, who need no longer be timid, since they will know themselves to be on safe ground. In either case you will have done us a great service, which we shall know how to repay."

The general let the effect of his speech work for a little while, then he drew nearer to the baroness, lowered his voice and spoke with intimate confidence.

"Your highness, I know your difficulties. Let me be quite frank. If I am successful, we, you and the

prince, your son, shall be acknowledged. And she who is the Duchess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka in the eyes of the French Government, is so for the whole world, let the Grand Duke Hilarius agree or not as he pleases. We shall also find employment for Prince Siegfried if he will devote his talents to France. True he is a German prince, but he comes of the Austrian branch of your family, and could at need be reckoned an Austrian. He can found a French branch of your illustrious house, and it lies with him to make the new line as famous as the others. Everything is in your hands, your highness. Set to work. The sooner the better. For I have to do with dangerous enemies, and must ere long strike a blow in order not to be overthrown. At present my cause is good. But the iron must be struck while it's hot. I must offer something tangible to my adherents so that they may make a last effort for me. Stand by me, your highness. I shall not feel humiliated to owe my victory to you."

"I will do what I can," said the baroness, in a voice full of emotion, and gave the general her hand.

He immediately bent his knee, reverently kissed her hand, and slowly let fall these words.

"Your highness, if God blesses your undertakings, then great nations will lie at your feet, as I do at this moment, and honour you as a benefactor, a mother, a saint."

"Stand up, general, and do not say such things to me," murmured the baroness, embarrassed. Madame Abeille grasped both her hands, and looking into her eyes, exclaimed—

"We have just lived through a historical moment!"

The visitors prepared to go.

"You won't lose any time, your highness, will you?" asked the general, at the boudoir door.

"I must find out his Majesty's movements, and make a few preparations. I will take the necessary steps as soon as circumstances permit.

"There is danger in delay, your highness," emphasized the general. "Do what you intend doing at once, I beg of you, and keep me informed of what happens."

"You may count on that, general."

The baroness was about to press the bell in order to summon the servants. The general prevented her.

"Excuse me, your highness, but it is better that we should get away quietly. We know the way."

When the baroness was alone, she sank back on the sofa, and lived the experiences of the last hour over again. Bertha entered the room, treading softly, and looked at her questioningly. She expected an exhaustive report of the visitors' business, and the details of the interview. She considered it her right, and was offended that the baroness not only kept back the anxiously expected narrative, but also said, in a tone of annoyance—

"Go away, Bertha. The visit has tired me. I must be alone. I'll ring when I want you."

The secret weighed heavily on her mind, and it would have been a great relief to tell Bertha. She felt, however, that, no matter how difficult it was to keep what she knew to herself, she ought not to reveal it. She reasoned with herself that State affairs of such enormous importance ought not to be intrusted to a subordinate, even if she was to be depended on. But a stronger reason was the unconscious fear of making herself ridiculous in Bertha's eyes.

For opposing ideas struggled violently in the baroness's head. What still remained of her former practical good sense whispered in her ear that she had undertaken something as much in her power as a voyage to the moon. But her powers of imagination, inflamed by the general's speech and Madame Abeille's extravagance, and enhanced by her passionate desire of personal success, spoke more loudly. She tried to persuade herself that, although it was difficult, it was not wholly impossible to keep her promise. She tried to rearrange and put a fresh construction on her reminiscences. Like a stage manager, she placed them in an artistic light, added and suppressed what was needed, in order to bring the illusion into relief, and placed on the boards a highly romantic piece with the elements of reality, in which she played

the part of an intimate friend of the Kaiser. Had he not really been very intimate with Prince Albrecht? Had he not once, while prince, dined with them? And at the Grand Duke's had he not repeatedly conversed with her in the most amiable way? And had he not sent her his remembrances in letters that she had seen? The connection with the great man had certainly ceased for years. But why could it not be renewed? It was almost incredible that he would not receive her if she went to Berlin and begged an audience. Of course, there was always the old difficulty: under what name should she announce herself? As "widow of his Royal Highness," etc.? Or should she sacrifice herself and appear as Baroness von Gronendal? That was hard, but perhaps the wisest. And, in any case, if her mission was successful, it was the last time she would have to suffer the humiliation.

She had not the least doubt on that point. The general's plan seemed to her quite reasonable. She was not German in regard to the Alsace-Lorraine question. It was a matter of indifference to her. She had French predilections. The many years' sojourn in Paris, the daily reading of the Boulevard journals, the intercourse with Madame Abeille, the Dormans, and other French acquaintances, had unconsciously attuned her feelings to the French key. Prince Albrecht and the whole Loewenstein Court had had French sympathies from the time of the Empire onwards, on the expression of which the baroness put a wrong interpretation. She saw nothing remarkable in speaking to the wearer of the German imperial crown, of yielding a German province to France. On the contrary, she took the general's point of view. She was doing something eminently meritorious. She was doing the Kaiser and the Empire a favour that would have unspeakably beneficial consequences. And while she was thinking out all this, and losing herself in a land of fabled wonder, she attained such importance in her own eyes that it gave her a marvellous respect for herself and a fresh joy in life; it raised and widened her *ego*, and

formed an astonishing contrast to the feelings of depression and insignificance that had assailed her during the last months.

She was so full of her new importance that she found herself unable to resist giving it some sort of expression. She pulled herself together, sat down to her little writing-table, and spent almost the whole time till dinner in writing out a sort of account of her interview with the general and Madame Abeille; it would form an important historical document for the edification of Siegfried's descendants, and for the archives of the youngest line of the house of Loewenstein-Franka. Notwithstanding the fatigues of the day, she was more lively at dinner than she had been for a long while, and delighted Count Laporte, the Dormans, and a diplomatist from Central America, who were her guests, with her animation and talkativeness, and surprised them with mysterious, scarcely comprehensible allusions to General Ménard, his importance, his policy, his views. The next day she hastened to her jeweller, and ordered a breast-pin, in the form of a red carnation. That was her special eccentricity. She must make small gifts of jewellery. Her first impulse was to have the flower in rubies. The price, however, frightened her, and she contented herself with red enamel on gold. She asked for it to be delivered as quickly as possible. The gift would prove her sympathy for the general, and that she was working eagerly at the task which had been intrusted to her.

She commissioned Siegfried to subscribe for a month to an important Berlin newspaper. He carried out her wishes, as was his habit, without asking the why and wherefore. That irritated the baroness, but she said nothing until the first number of the paper arrived. Meanwhile she had decided to take Siegfried into her confidence. As she unfolded the paper after lunch, she asked her son—

"You've no desire to know why I subscribe to this paper?"

"You know, mamma, that curiosity is not my failing," he replied drily.

"I should, however, like to feel that you took some interest in my doings," rejoined the baroness, sharply. The acrimonious feeling that was always present in her intercourse with her son vexed her. Siegfried became silent as soon as he recognized the customary tone, and withdrew into himself. If the baroness looked to pursue the conversation and to reach the desired point, she would have to go the whole distance alone, Siegfried would not meet her halfway.

"It is on account of the Court news."

"Ah?" said Siegfried.

"I must be informed of the Kaiser's movements," continued his mother.

"Really?"

"For I mean shortly to pay him a visit."

Siegfried opened his eyes wide, and said quickly, "Impossible!" He paused for a while, and then continued, "That's a courageous determination, mamma, but I fear it's a useless effort. I'm sure the Kaiser will not mix himself up with our family affairs, and if, contrary to all expectations, he did, the Grand Duke Hilarius stands nearer to him than we do."

"That's not the reason; that would be absurd," said his mother.

"Then, I can't think——"

"Of course you can't."

When he looked at her wonderingly and questioningly, she became quite tender and affectionate, asked him to sit close to her, and read him the account of her interview with General Ménard. In spite of his habitual self-control, Siegfried's countenance expressed the greatest astonishment which was gradually replaced by discontent.

"But, mamma," he exclaimed, when she had finished, "how could you possibly let yourself get so far with the general?"

"Always fault-finding!" she replied ill-humouredly. "Don't you understand what it means to have an ally in the man who will be ruler of France to-morrow?"

"That's not certain. And it may be very bad for us

to ally ourselves with him. What should we do if we were expelled the country?"

"They wouldn't dare to do that."

"I'm not so sure; and even if that didn't happen, I've no confidence in the man. I don't think he's so near his goal. To be quite candid, I don't believe in his success. But, even if he does succeed, the dictator will be in haste to forget what the demagogue promised."

"Why do you always look at the worst side? The general is incapable of meanness, I'm certain. Besides, it'll cost him nothing to keep his promise," affirmed the baroness.

"And then, how can you dare to approach the Kaiser with such a presumptuous demand?" asked Siegfried.

"What do I risk? If the Kaiser finds the general's proposition unacceptable, he will say so."

"But very ungraciously."

"I don't see why. I'm only a higher sort of postman. Yes, if I recommended the plan——"

"Only that was lacking! You're not on the French side in this question!"

"It grieves me, my child, to see such a narrow spirit in you. I'm neither on the French side nor on the German side, but on our side. Don't you understand? Jingoism is for the Philistines of the beer-house. We stand above it. Only our family interests weigh with us, and we only value patriotism so far as it furthers those interests. Do you suppose that your uncle of Atlantis, or your cousin of Hageland, or your aunt of Gotheim, are ever actuated by feelings of German patriotism? No, their desire is to do everything for their own crowns, even if it's not to Germany's advantage? At the present moment our best policy is to form an alliance with France. That was your great-uncle's policy towards Napoleon I. Our family didn't do badly by it, did they? I don't see why I should not follow my great-uncle's example."

The baroness saw the mirage so clearly embodied before her, her self-deception was so complete and frank, that even Siegfried could not help being somewhat infected although he heard an inward voice calling, "It's all

absolute nonsense." He contented himself with saying half aloud—

"The diminution of Germany is a high price to pay for the recognition of our rights."

"We shan't have to pay, boy," exclaimed the baroness, passionately. "Our game is certain. If the Kaiser thinks that the friendship of France is worth a small sacrifice, he'll make it. If not, he won't. In either case I have only been an honourable go-between, and claim my reward for undertaking the mission."

"Always provided the general can pay it," observed Siegfried.

"How can you doubt it? Look at the man, triumph shines out of his eyes. I see the star above his head. Napoleon must have looked like that after Lodi."

Siegfried bowed in silence.

"For the present," said his mother, "all I want of you is silence."

"That is a matter of course," he replied.

"You may leave the rest to me."

Siegfried carefully kept the secret although he found it difficult not to confide in Nicoline. He could not entirely avoid allusions to his mother's relations with General Ménard, but they were too vague to awake Nicoline's curiosity. Had she pressed him with questions, it is very doubtful if he could have resisted her desire to know, and his desire to impart what he knew.

One evening in the following week Janusz told the baroness that an unknown gentleman, who would not give his name, wished particularly to speak to her. She sent Bertha down to survey the visitor, and if possible to find out his business. The maid returned with the information that he came from Madame Abeille, and desired to speak to her highness herself. The baroness said she would see him. As she entered the drawing-room, into which he had been shown and which was only dimly lighted, there hurried up to her an apparently very stout man in a broad cloak, with a long fair patriarchal beard, and blue spectacles; he greeted her in a not altogether unfamiliar

voice. She looked at him searchingly, and said, with hesitation—

"Sir, you come from Madame Abeille——"

He seemed to play a little with her hesitation, and then said—

"You don't recognize me, your highness?"

She looked at him more closely, but found no solution.

He removed his spectacles, and held his hand in front of his beard.

"General Ménard!" she exclaimed, in the greatest surprise.

"S-sh," he said smiling; and added softly, "The disguise is successful."

"But what does it mean?" asked the baroness.

"It means that this wretched Government have set a pack of detectives to dog my steps. Most of those good people are friendly, and desire nothing better than to serve me. They shut their eyes as soon as they see me, and are in haste to lose my traces. But there are some mangy dogs among them, and so I must be careful. I only go out after dark and always in a new disguise. It is very amusing. I visit openly only those persons whom I can't compromise, or whom I wish to compromise. You, your highness, belong neither to the one nor the other. Therefore I am compelled to surprise you in this fashion. It will not be repeated. I esteem you too highly for that. I won't give the wretches a chance of revenge here." In silence she gave him her hand, which he kissed, and asked him to sit down.

"That's the situation, your highness," continued the general, after he had fastened the spectacles behind his ears again. "Things are rapidly heading to a crisis. I must strike my chief blow. May I venture to ask what you have done so far?"

"I have made all preparations," she replied boldly. "I have written to Berlin so that I may be kept informed of the Kaiser's movements. Just now he is hunting in East Prussia, and it would be difficult to gain access to him. As soon as I hear that he's at Potsdam, I will consider further."

"I beseech you, your highness, not to delay. Success in that direction will ensure success in my plans."

"Excuse me, general, but I don't quite understand one thing. Do you mean that you want a conclusive treaty in a few days or hours? Under the most favourable circumstances the negotiations must take months."

"If I judge your Kaiser aright, he is thoroughly modern, and the modern man makes decisions quickly. The details will require time, but the main point can soon be decided. That is sufficient. If I can only say to the army and the people that I bring them the revision of the Peace of Frankfort as an introductory gift—you'll see how that will work."

She threw back her head quickly, and exclaimed, "But, general, wouldn't a premature revelation spoil everything?"

The general smiled complacently.

"Why should it? I shall know how to carry the matter through with the Kaiser, so that he doesn't draw back. Always provided of course that he finds it to his advantage to come to an agreement with me."

His easy unsuspicious trustfulness worked on her like magic. She became absolutely unable to distinguish between the possible and the apparent, and she lived in the fairy tale as if in the most natural circumstances. She promised all he asked, and they parted as if they had brought their cause nearer to its great end.

But the impression did not last long, and away from his presence the feeling for reality awoke again. The journey to Germany became a distant, hazy idea; she took no decisive step. She contented herself with driving to the jeweller's and urging him to send her the gold carnation as quickly as possible, and so eased her conscience with regard to the general. But the general, who naturally knew nothing of all she was doing for him with the jeweller, became very impatient, and, after waiting a day or two, sent Madame Abeille to find out if the baroness had started, and if she had not yet left Paris to urge her to do so without delay. The interview between the two friends was not

agreeable. Madame Abeille heaped reproaches on the baroness that were gentle only in tone. She gave her to understand that greater zeal had been counted on, more cordial return for the hospitality which the self-exiled woman had received in Paris, a stronger love for the country which had offered her an honourable refuge when persecuted in her native home. The baroness felt the ambiguity of her position too keenly to point out to the angry woman that she was neither France nor Paris, and had no sort of right to speak, to warn, or to demand, in the name of either one or the other. She was more anxious for evasion, and declared that she had delayed the execution of the plan because one consideration had occurred to her—"What consideration?" asked Madame Abeille. That she ought to have some authority, some credit—

Madame Abeille strongly opposed that idea. What made her of such inimitable value as a go-between was that she needed no such credit, that her words could raise no doubts, that her supporters could be entirely concealed and could negotiate in full security.

The baroness held to her pretext. She did not of course need an introduction. But, considering the importance of the business, she did not care to rely on an impromptu speech, but wished the general to put formally in writing what he desired and what he offered. The note would be only for her, not for the Kaiser, and would help her to avoid any vagueness in the decisive interview.

That satisfied Madame Abeille, and she promised to get the general to write the desired note. The next day Madame Abeille appeared again, bringing the document with her. It was in her handwriting. The small sheet of letter paper, with writing only on one half side, betrayed no sort of connection with General Ménard. Madame Abeille pointed out the advantages of that.

"The paper compromises no one, neither you, princess, nor the great party which sets its hopes on you. Start at once, princess. Our heartbeats accompany you."

As the baroness, lost in thought, stared at the paper

and said nothing, Madame Abeille came close up to her, and said in a hoarse voice—

"Princess you and your deceased husband did me the honour to call me your friend. You had sufficient confidence in me to let me know something of your circumstances. That encourages me to touch frankly on a delicate point. You will have to make an appearance in Berlin in accordance with your rank. Such a journey is expensive."

The baroness started. But Madame Abeille put her hand on her arm, and continued quickly—

"Ready money is not always available. Anybody may be so hindered. And it would not be right to allow you to make great sacrifices. It is more than enough that you should undertake the troubles and perils of the mission. You will permit us—— "

"I will permit you nothing," exclaimed the baroness angrily. "I know you do not mean to offend me. Not another word ! "

Madame Abeille stood up, embraced her passionately, and whispered—

"Always the princess from head to foot. Forgive me." She went away quickly.

The baroness now felt herself hard pressed. She must keep the promise so lightly made, or Madame Abeille, General Ménard, and all their circle would regard her as a mere swindler. As long as the undertaking remained in the region of dreams and legends, there seemed nothing impossible about it. But now that it drew near, and took solid form, deeply contrite, she recognized that she had entered on an unpardonable gasconade, and could not escape bitter humiliation. Sleep, which she only secured by the use of drugs, left her even in spite of increased doses, and during two nights of veritable martyrdom she thought and thought, but all in vain, of some plan that would save her. Nothing occurred to her usually fertile brain. She had not even the comfort of talking the matter over with Bertha, and utilizing her inventive skill. She became so ill that her physician ordered her to stay in bed for a

couple of days. When he said, "Your highness, you can't get up to-day," the long-sought means of safety flashed through her mind.

"Would you be so kind, doctor, as to write this for me to my friend, Madame Abeille," she implored.

"With pleasure, your highness," said the physician, and he showed Madame Abeille in a couple of lines that the condition of his patient's heart required instant and complete rest.

The note brought its recipient to the baroness's bedside without delay. Madame Abeille was too kind-hearted to worry the sufferer with business, but her manner betrayed impatience and excitement. The baroness understood the hoarse tone of the voice in which she expressed the hope that her illness would very soon pass, and that she would resume her active habits.

"Unhappily the doctor does not seem to think it very likely," complained the baroness.

"I heartily hope he is mistaken, and that your strong vitality may give the lie to his prognostications. Illness invariably comes when it isn't wanted, and never more than this time."

Madame Abeille made no other allusion to the affair. Only when she brought the short visit that was permitted to an end, she said—

"Get well quickly, dearest princess; we have such need of you."

How long could the baroness diplomatically use this illness to her advantage? She could not condemn herself to eternal confinement to her bed or her room. Should she shelter herself behind a general medical order forbidding her long journeys or excitement? In that case, in order to play the part properly, she must give up going to plays, dinners or parties, indeed all social life, and that was impossible. At last a solution occurred to her, but one of unspeakable meanness. She would actually go to Berlin, remain there for a few days, and ask for an audience. If she was received she would simply pay the Kaiser the homage due to him from herself and her son, and take care that her reception was mentioned by the

Press. If she did not succeed in obtaining an audience, it would make little difference. In either case she would return to Paris, and sorrowfully inform Ménard that her mission was unsuccessful; the Kaiser had graciously listened to her, had asked for information about Parisian politics and persons, but had decisively refused to yield German territory. She could dish up this story with perfect safety. Who could prove it to be false? General Ménard had no means of ascertaining that the Kaiser had not received her, and it was quite impossible for him to discover the real trend of the conversation. She would have formally fulfilled her promise, and General Ménard would be her debtor.

The intercession of St. Antony of Padua, whom she specially reverenced, and to whom she made many gifts, as the special providence that watched over widows, spared her the miserable fraud. She began preparations for the journey, ordered the astonished Bertha to have the trunks fetched up, and pack them for the next day, when a thunderbolt fell. The government determined to imprison General Ménard, the decision was quickly notified to him by one of his secret adherents in the police, and, without delay, he fled in disguise beyond the frontier. Siegfried brought his mother the evening paper with the news of Ménard's flight, and asked her—

"What about the general's star now?"

He looked surprised that she seemed in no way disturbed by the news. The "Impossible!" with which she received it sounded more like an exclamation of joy than of grief. She asked him to go to Madame Abeille at once, and discover the details. She called to Bertha joyfully—

"We shan't want the trunks. I'm not going away."

She regarded the general's fall as a release in her uttermost need, and showered gifts on St. Antony of Padua as if her life had been saved. At the same time she somewhat contradictorily nursed the vague hope that the general's fate might turn, that he might come back, and be placed at the head of the State by his party, and then do for her all that he had promised.

She determined, so far as in her opinion it could be done without danger, to cherish her relations with General Ménard more carefully than ever. At last the jeweller sent home the gold carnation about which with continual grumbling over the indolence of the workmen, he had taken nearly three weeks. The baroness informed Siegfried that he must go to Gotheim in order to deliver the jewel in person to the general who had pitched his tent in a suburb of Thiodvik; there he was far enough from Paris to be out of reach of his political adversaries, but near enough to be in readiness for action.

It was the first time that the baroness had employed her son on any sort of mission. She let him feel what an important task she was entrusting to him, and gave him most minute instructions. He was to assure the general of her unchangeable devotion. The affair had become abortive through the unfavourable turn of fortune, but a change would come, and should the general again be able to speak in the name of his country, she was at his service.

The Dormans knew nothing of the high political matters that bound the general and the baroness together. But they knew of their friendship, and had declared themselves fanatical supporters of General Ménard; for, thinking that they saw in him a future Cæsar, they nursed the hope that if he was successful, they might creep into a small place in his anteroom. The baroness did not hesitate to speak of Siegfried's journey to Gotheim, and its purpose, the presentation of the gold carnation, before them. Without any fixed plan, merely as the result of their everlasting parasitical ways, they both immediately asked who was going to accompany the prince? When the baroness, in surprise, said that for so short a journey no companion was needed, they declared, respectfully but firmly, that it was quite out of the question for the prince to travel alone. He was in some measure undertaking an official, ceremonious commission to the future ruler of France, and must therefore have a small suite. If he went as an insignificant messenger, he lowered his own dignity and the character of his mission. Therefore he must take them with him to Thiodvik.

The idea harmonized too well with the baroness's feeling for her to oppose it. But consideration for her position compelled her to accept the young men's offer under one condition. Only the younger Dorman, the little fair Guy, should accompany Siegfried. Thereupon, although all his expenses would be paid, he asked for a suitable sum of pocket-money for his stay in Gotheim; the baroness gave it him with secret pain.

Nicoline was surprised when at their next meeting, Siegfried informed her of his coming journey. He told her only of the gold carnation which he was to present in person to General Ménard, because his mother would not trust it to the post. He felt justified in keeping silence about the political side of his mission. He did not feel himself so at one with Nicoline as to be unable to keep anything from her. The concealment caused him a slight uneasiness which he tried to overcome by telling himself that he was silent out of regard for her, so as not to disturb her with the knowledge of dark and daring undertakings.

Nicoline took no interest in the domestic politics of France. She saw two or three Paris daily papers, but she only read the news of the day, and the notes on the theatres and on art. The rest she merely skimmed. She had scarcely noticed the stormy agitation which had arisen over General Ménard. He was perfectly indifferent to her. His flight to Gotheim made no impression on her. She regarded Siegfried's journey as one of the baroness's usual bids for notoriety, and was only sorry that he should permit himself to be employed in such foolishness. She asked him how long he would be away.

"Three or four days, perhaps. I may like to stay a few days longer in Thiodvik and look about me. I saw so little of it when I was there with my father five years ago," he replied.

The answer irritated her, she did not quite know why; but she concealed her annoyance.

"A pleasant journey, and a good time," she said. "Send me some picture postcards, and let me know as soon as you are back."

"Of course, Nicoline. And won't you write to me?"

"It's not worth while. And I shouldn't have anything to tell you."

"Yes, you would."

"What?"

"Whether you are thinking of me. Whether you miss me."

"It's rather late to think of that."

He began to make some asseverations; but she stopped him, saying—

"Go, Siegfried, the change will do you good. I'm sorry you won't be here for our concert. I should have liked you to be present at my first public appearance. But I'm not superstitious."

Two or three times a year, sometimes for a charitable object, sometimes without that pretext, Signora Conti gave concerts in order to introduce her pupils to the public and to the Press. She considered that Nicoline had made sufficient progress to sing twice at the concert arranged for May.

Siegfried had no inclination to put off his journey for a few days in order to be present at the concert. Nicoline would certainly have declined the sacrifice; but she would have been grateful for the intention. She parted from Siegfried somewhat coolly, and thought, as she went the last part of the way home by herself, "In fact, he only thinks of himself, as they all do."

Siegfried and his companion took up their quarters at one of the best hotels at Thiodvik, the former inscribing himself boldly as the Count von Gleichen. That was one of the twenty or thirty titles of the Loewenstein family, and, on account of a romantic legend connected with it, they liked to use it when they travelled *incognito*. He acted thus on his mother's advice, who had impressed on him the necessity for great prudence.

He sent Guy de Dorman to General Ménard to tell him that he was in Thiodvik, that he had something to give him from his mother, and to ask when he could see him. Dorman did not succeed in seeing the general

himself. He only saw his secretary, who took his address, and promised that he should soon hear from him, whereupon he assured him that the prince and himself would remain at their hotel during the afternoon, and hold themselves at the general's service. Soon after lunch, first Dorman and then Siegfried was called to the telephone. The secretary named himself, and asked if he was speaking to Prince Loewenstein-Franka. Upon an affirmative answer, a brief pause ensued; then Siegfried heard Ménard's voice, saying—

"How do you do, prince; it's very kind of you and your mother to trouble about me. What have you got for me?"

"General, I should consider it a great privilege to speak to you in person. When may I go to you?"

"I advise you not to come. My house is under constant supervision, and spies are set on every visitor. There's no point in your compromising yourself. The post and the telephone are safer. If you have papers for me, send them by post. If it's a verbal communication, make it now at your ease."

"It isn't papers, general, but a little present from my mother, a breast-pin in the form of your favourite flower, with a few engraved dedicatory words, a modest assurance of my mother's sincere friendship, and, I venture to add, of my own devotion."

"Really! Most kind. Best thanks. What else?"

"I am to tell you from my mother how sorry she is that events did not allow her to act in the matter arranged——"

"You know about it?" sounded hastily through the telephone.

"Yes, I know, general. My mother is also very sorry that no time was left for her to carry out the business, and she holds herself at your disposal, for the time, assuredly not far off, when you will have an opportunity of making use of us again."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. I've nothing else to say."

A strange silence followed, which made Siegfried think

that the connection was switched off. But before he could ask, he heard the general's voice again.

"Prince, during the last few days, I have been forced to learn much treachery. I conclude that my experience with the princess does not come under that category."

"General!" angrily exclaimed Siegfried.

"Let me speak frankly," came severely back. "Tell your mother that her illness was a great misfortune for us all. She had it in her power to turn events. She did not do so."

"Was unable to do so, general."

"So you say, prince. Certain opportunities once lost, never recur. Give your mother my respectful remembrances, and greet my beautiful France, which welcomes you, a stranger, while I dare not cross the frontier."

"Then you won't see me, general?"

"Better not."

"And the breast-pin?"

A short pause, then, "Send it by post, or by your companion. Pleasant journey."

The interview was at an end. With a whirling head and clenched teeth, Siegfried left the office in which it had taken place. Dorman hastened to meet him, and, with a constrained manner, Siegfried told him to go back to Ménard with the parcel, and to give it to him, or if to his secretary, to demand a receipt. As he offered no explanation, Dorman guessed that the mission was unsuccessful. Siegfried wrote to his mother—

"Dear Mamma,

"General Ménard is a mean wretch. Under specious pretext he refused to see me, and scarcely thanked for your thoughtful gift, which I've sent him by Dorman. He gave me clearly to understand that he considered you had deceived him. I've the greatest desire to challenge the fellow; but that would be doing him too much honour, and here, in Gotheim, such things are no joke. Ménard richly deserves his fate. It is well that things

have so turned out. The swindler would have thrown us into a bed of nettles, and there let us lie. I hope you are well. Best love from your dutiful son,

"SIEGFRIED."

He sent Nicoline a picture postcard, with the words—

"DEAR N.,

"I think of you, I think of our walk which I must forego to-day. I shall soon see you again. Don't quite forget your faithful

"S."

Dorman could hardly be back for three hours. Meanwhile, Siegfried took a walk through the noisy streets of Thiodvik. He felt a great void in himself, and a painful purposelessness in his wandering, or keeping at home, in his journey, and also in his life. He had honestly believed that he had nothing to expect or hope from Ménard; but, now that the castle in the air had disappeared, he was obliged to acknowledge that he had built himself one on the promises of the political adventurer. Nothing, then, was to come of the French alliance, as his mother grandly called it, or of the recognition of the French government, with the pressure brought on the Grand Duke Hilarius by the insistence of a great power. A gold and enamelled jewel that his mother certainly had got on credit, a pointless journey, which had brought him no amusement, that was the whole result of the important business of the last weeks.

And to anticipate a little: that was, and remained, the whole result. For, a few weeks later, General Ménard lay on a garden path with a bullet in his breast, shot in a duel by the husband of a woman he had betrayed. At the sale of his effects, after his burial in foreign soil, a collector acquired the baroness's breast-pin for less than the value of the gold, and the newspapers which published an illustration of it and the inscription, added the question, "What romance is hidden in this gift from a loving

hand, with its sentimental dedication from an unknown donor?"

Although Siegfried was so deeply sunk in thought, he noticed, after a time, that he was attracting the attention of the passers-by. He was accustomed to be stared at in the streets of Paris on account of his great stature. But that could not be the reason here, where tall and very tall men were much more frequent than in Paris. Many people stopped and looked after him, couples whispered a hasty word to each other when they saw him; some greeted him in so respectful a manner that at first he did not think it was he that could be meant, and looked about for the person for whom the bow was intended. He could not, however, remain long in doubt that it was meant for him, and the discovery embarrassed him, because it set him a problem. Suddenly a solution dawned on him. He passed a shop window in which large photographs were displayed, and to his liveliest astonishment, he seemed to recognize his own likeness. He stopped and read, "His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince."

So that was it! The people took him for their crown prince. At first he felt flattered, then he was filled with fresh bitterness. He had not hitherto thought of it. Now he became clearly conscious of it. He was once again, as during all his boyhood until they settled in Paris, in a land ruled over by his family; he was actually a member of the reigning family here, and was wandering about the capital of their empire like a nameless outcast, honoured by the greetings of the passers-by, which were irony to him, and about which they would be seriously annoyed when they discovered their error.

Following the direction of his thoughts, Siegfried suddenly came to a decision. Why should he not wait on the queen? Years ago she had desired his visit. She had been very kind to him; perhaps her feelings had not changed. So possibly the broken threads between himself and his family might be mended just at one of the most important places, and he would have done something for himself and his future at last.

Without delay, he called a cab, and bade the driver

go to the royal palace. On the way he kept asking himself: "What shall I say to the queen?" And then a strange thought came into his head. He tried to penetrate right into Nicoline's soul, and to say and do in his interview with the queen exactly what from his knowledge of her temperament, Nicoline would say and do under similar circumstances. He felt certain that in this way he would strike the right note.

When he alighted at the principal entrance of the palace, he saw that the flag was not flying. He went to the porter's lodge, which opened off the great hall close to the entrance, and asked unconcernedly—

"Her majesty is not in town?"

"No, your highness," replied the man in the gold-laced red coat, getting up most respectfully. "Her majesty has been at Castle Stormby for a week." The porter did not doubt for a moment that one of his mistress's foreign relatives stood before him. "The Lord Chamberlain is in the palace. Would your highness like to see him?"

"No, thank you. It's not necessary," said Siegfried, whose scanty knowledge of the language compelled brevity, and he took his departure, much pleased with the impression he had made on the servant.

Castle Stormby was about an hour by train from Thiodvik. Siegfried thought it impracticable to go that afternoon. Notwithstanding the distance, he walked back to his hotel, and on the way received many tokens of respect from policemen, soldiers, and casual passers-by, without embarrassment, as if it was his due, and a matter of course.

He found Guy de Dorman waiting for him. He had seen General Ménard, and had delivered the gold carnation. After a cursory glance at the jewel, the general had laid it on his writing-table, asked after the baroness's and Prince Siegfried's health, demanded his own name and circumstances, and, with kind remembrances to both, had dismissed him.

Siegfried listened to the report abstractedly. He had done with Ménard, his mission was insignificant; he lived now in the expectation of his interview with the queen.

He contented himself with informing his companion, "We shall stay here a little longer;" and he, much delighted, immediately suggested a series of amusements for that evening and the next day. It was approved with some abbreviations.

The next day Siegfried went to Stormby. Before the principal gate of the castle stood a double guard. When the sentries saw the young man, they hesitated and then presented arms. With a slight acknowledgment, Siegfried went past them through the great courtyard to the steps leading to the central pavilion, where an official met him, who looked at him sharply, and then, lifting his hat, waited for him to speak.

"Is her Majesty here?" asked Siegfried.

"No. Their highnesses have been cruising about the islands in their yacht since the day before yesterday. They are expected back to-morrow evening."

"Dr. Pelgram?"

"Is with them."

Siegfried said nothing, and after waiting a little, the official asked—

"With whom have I the honour to speak?"

Siegfried pretended not to have heard, nodded slightly and went, taking in, with a long glance, the central building, the two wings, and the gilded railings of the entrance side. He remembered its form exactly, and lived over again the confused impressions, born of pride and humiliation, that he had received there in his youth.

He was so full of his purpose, that he could not resist telling Dorman that he meant to pay the queen a visit, that she was now at sea, and would not be back till the day after to-morrow. It made such an impression upon his companion that he, in his turn, could not repress the feeling of importance that came over him, and he began to talk in the hotel. Siegfried noticed the change in the behaviour of the servants, and of his fellow-guests towards him, but he took it for a consequence of the family likeness.

Two days pass quickly in Thiodvik, even when a future day is eagerly desired. Siegfried could scarcely manage to send his mother a few colourless words, and

Nicoline a brief greeting. The third day he went to Stormby again. This time the royal banner floated over the central pavilion, the courtyard was full of animation, officials and servants coming and going, and at the entrance, a man in uniform asked Siegfried what he wanted.

"To see Dr. Pelgram," said Siegfried. Dr. Pelgram was the queen's German secretary and librarian, and held a position of confidence with her far beyond the usual duties of the post. He was the brother of Siegfried's tutor, and he regarded him as a near friend.

"Will you give me your card?" asked the man in uniform.

Siegfried felt in his breast-pocket, suddenly grew red, took his hand out, and said—

"Have you a piece of paper and a pen or pencil?"

The official silently went towards a room in the wing, bade Siegfried enter, and gave him what he asked. Siegfried wrote "Baron von Gronendal," and gave him the paper. The official looked at it quickly, and said, in a much stiffer manner, "Will you wait here."

It was fully a quarter of an hour before he returned, and signed to Siegfried to follow him. He led him up the steps into the great ante-hall which was filled with a dozen servants, two or three officials, and a number of non-commissioned officers and soldiers. Siegfried's appearance roused among them a restrained yet unmistakable attention. His likeness to their prince amazed them, but from the behaviour of his guide they concluded he could not be what he seemed.

He was delivered over to a footman with the direction, "To Dr. Pelgram." He was led up staircases, along corridors, and through rooms to a little door which the man opened, and then shut behind him. Siegfried found himself in a moderately large, simply furnished room, the two tall windows of which looked out on to an extensive park. A thin man of middle height, with shaved face and carefully brushed hair, in a black coat and white tie, rose from behind a massive writing-table covered with books and papers, and with even steps went to meet his visitor.

"This is a real surprise," he said, holding out his hand to Siegfried without bowing and speaking in a quiet voice, the tone of which he did not raise, "Come nearer, Baron von Gronendal, and sit down."

When they were both seated, he continued—

"Now, how are you, my dear Baron von Gronendal?"

"Thank you, quite well; and you, doctor?"

"Much work, little recreation, the old story. It's a long time since you were in Franka?"

"A very long time."

"H'm. Well, well. And what procures me this pleasure?"

"Isn't it natural that I should come and see you when I am in Thiodvik?"

"Ah yes, of course. Have you been long in Thiodvik?"

"A few days."

"Really, really."

A pause followed which lengthened out and began to be painful. Siegfried had to decide on a line of action.

"How is the queen?" he asked.

Dr. Pelgram threw a quick glance at Siegfried from his piercing blue eyes, and then turned them away.

"Her majesty is very well except for occasional rheumatic pains."

"Do you know, doctor, I should so much like to see her?"

"Indeed."

"Will you procure me an audience?"

"I?" exclaimed Dr. Pelgram, waking into life for the first time, and pushing back his chair. "How do you come to that idea, my dear Baron von Gronendal? You know too much of court etiquette to believe seriously that I dare take it on myself to announce visitors to her majesty! People have to gain an audience through the official court."

"People! But I'm not people. You forget that I have the honour to be acquainted with her majesty, that I have been her guest, that I am closely related to her."

"That's all quite right, but it has nothing to do with my office, to the duties of which I strictly adhere."

As Siegfried said nothing, and kept his eyes down, Dr. Pelgram, rising, added—

"And now you must excuse me, Baron von Gronendal. I received you as a matter of course, but at half-past eleven I am commanded to make my report, and you will understand that I must not keep her majesty waiting."

Siegfried hastily consulted his watch, and saw that there was plenty of time still. He got up, however.

"Thank you for seeing me, although your time is so full. I should like to ask one question. Will you tell me how I am regarded here, and what sort of a reception I may hope for?"

The question was put so frankly and straightforwardly that it disarmed Dr. Pelgram's diplomacy.

"You want to know the truth? Then I won't hide it from you." His tone was more cordial than it had been all the time. "Don't take the trouble to ask for an audience, it would not be granted you. There is a good deal of sympathy for you in the highest places, but your mother's behaviour has made a very unfavourable impression, and you are held somewhat responsible for it. For you are now of age, and could have let it be seen that you did not share your mother's strange views."

The veins in Siegfried's forehead swelled, and he replied more passionately than he was conscious of—

"But I share them entirely, and do not see how they are strange."

"You have not asked for my views," said Dr. Pelgram, and his tone again became cold, "but for those held in influential quarters. I allowed myself to answer you to the injury of my official duties, because I have human sympathy with my brother's pupil, whom I have known from childhood. Discussion of these far-reaching questions would be never-ending. I can't enter on them. Excuse me—my duties."

Siegfried had regained his composure, and felt sad—

"Have you nothing else to say to me? I'm going away at once, and you will probably never see me again."

Dr. Pelgram gave him a long look. Then he stretched out his hand, and said—

"I wish, with all my heart, that you may be well advised. You have everything necessary to happiness, and you are on the road to destroy it. Turn round. There is still time. That is the warning of a man of common sense, I may say, of a friend." He went to the door, and opened it. Siegfried pressed his hand in silence, bowed, and went.

This time nobody troubled about him, and he had to find his way out alone. He lost himself several times in the intricate corridors before a servant appeared and showed him the way. The sentries at the doors, the chamberlains and adjutants in the rooms, the servants in the passages, demonstrated clearly by what a power the inner circle was closed to him. And yet his place was there —his right to it was written on his face—and he wished to obtain it. But he went forth now a contemned stranger, and he thought bitterly—

"It only needs a revolution and all these sentries would turn their bayonets against you. Then you would have to get through these corridors, unattended, secretly, as I have done. You would deserve to be treated as you treat your own flesh and blood."

His ill-humour made him feel the need of being alone. He lunched at a modest inn which he found near the railway station, loitered a little on the river bank, took a slow train back to Thiodvik, and reached the hotel late in the afternoon.

Guy de Dorman did not appear until dinner-time.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "the queen invited you to luncheon. I thought that was it when you did not turn up at one o'clock. Now, prince, tell me all about it."

"Dorman, we return to Paris, to-night. Ask for the bill," was Siegfried's dry answer.

Somewhat surprised, Dorman bowed, rang for the waiter, who received the order with the customary "Yessir." A quarter of an hour passed and he had not appeared; during the time Siegfried received Dorman's repeated approaches with a rough—

"Let me alone!"

They had to ring again before another servant appeared with the bill.

A shadow crossed Siegfried's face when Dorman handed him the paper he had taken from the tray. When the man had gone, Siegfried said—

"They're a set of thieves!"

Dorman looked at the figures, and murmured—

"Well, it's certainly not cheap here."

"The tariff is hung up in the rooms. The figures don't tally. Will you go and see about it at the office?"

Dorman muttered confusedly—

"H'm, that's rather difficult. Evidently they've seen through your incognito. *Noblesse oblige.*"

Siegfried could have laughed aloud. He enjoyed all the advantages of his royal standing without the official recognition of it. His depression was stronger than his sense of humour—

"I fear I haven't so much with me. Perhaps you——"

"Ah, no, prince," answered Dorman, quickly. "I am myself short of money to-day, and intended to ask you——"

"Then we're in a nice mess," murmured Siegfried, taking a rapid look at the money in his purse, a proceeding that did not diminish his dissatisfaction. "I've no choice but to write to Paris, and wait for the reply."

"Then we shan't leave to-night?"

"Of course not."

"Shall we dine here, prince?"

"Yes."

Dorman went to his room, in order to dress for dinner. Siegfried sat down and wrote to his mother that she must send him five hundred francs immediately, since the thousand he had with him would not suffice to pay the disgracefully exorbitant hotel bill.

Dorman thought he ought to continue to fill the office of master of the ceremonies, and proposed that they should go to the opera, and some music-halls that night, and the next day to the races. Siegfried, however,

declined so ill-humouredly, that, despite his parasitic ability, the young man could not summon up courage to ask for an addition to his pocket-money.

Siegfried spent the next two days in the Gotheim Museum, in the National Gallery, and the Zoological Gardens, paying scant attention to the objects of interest that surrounded him, tortured as he was by his inmost thoughts. He was thoroughly discontented with himself. He was not greatly affected by Ménard's refusal to receive him, although, unconsciously, it left a sting. He reproached himself for having been so easily discouraged by Pelgram. Why hadn't he carried out his plan? Why hadn't he quietly gone to the chamberlain, or the adjutant in attendance, and asked to be announced to the queen. That is what Nicoline would have done. He could never have carried it through. His strength would have failed halfway. He must train himself to persevere. Otherwise he would have to renounce everything, and submit like a weak coward.

At last his mother's letter, with the money, came. She wrote—

"DEAR SIEGFRIED—

"Enclosed are the five hundred francs. Now, come back at once. I have no objection to your amusing yourself, but I expect some consideration for our circumstances in a young man of your age.

"Your suffering

"MOTHER.

"P.S.—In order to procure the money, Bertha had to pawn my topaz bracelet."

Siegfried reached Paris late in the evening. The baroness was alone, and had waited dinner for him. He greeted her coolly, and gave an account of his mission during dinner. His mother contented herself with a sigh and the observation—

"The general is embittered. He does not value the sacrifice we made for him. Ingratitude is a common feature in those Cæsar temperaments."

After some delay and inward struggle, Siegfried told her of his interview with Dr. Pelgram.

The baroness was all attention. "How did you come to that notion?"

"I hoped he would help me to see the queen."

The baroness shook her head. "Siegfried, Siegfried, how can you be so stupid?"

"I thought I might help our cause."

"You thought. That's just it. You shouldn't think. It's always foolishness. You should always leave it to me, or at least ask me beforehand, when you can't restrain an impulse to action. Pelgram is a sneak and a cringing creature. He is the Grand Duke's tool, and fills the queen's ears with things in our disfavour. He was the very last person to whom you should have turned."

Siegfried was again driven back on himself, and said no more.

After dinner he went out. He wanted, if possible, to see Nicoline that evening. He felt he owed her much. During these last days she had been relegated to the background. He had not kept his promise to write every day. And he had not brought her anything from Thiodvik; not the smallest souvenir, to prove that she had been in his thoughts during the separation. He did not venture to call on her, for she had expressly forbidden him to do so, but he walked up and down in front of the house, hoping that good luck might bring her to the window. He had, however, to content himself with writing to her that he had come back, was most impatient to see her, and hoped she would meet him to-morrow afternoon as early as possible at the usual place.

She came. He hurriedly kissed her hand, and his lips trembled a little. She drew her hand away, and said, in a slightly reproachful tone—

"At last! You weren't away four days, but a whole week."

"Yes, Nicoline; unforeseen events kept me in Thiodvik."

"Oh! I feared your letters had gone astray. Did they?"

"I wrote three times," said Siegfried, in a low voice.

"Then I received them all. But when three days passed without a sign from you, I was anxious, and thought something had gone wrong with you or your correspondence."

"No—I was only—I was always on the move—I couldn't——"

"Don't make excuses. You had something more important to do. Affairs of state come first. That is a matter of course."

"Nicoline, you're laughing at me."

"Laughing! I thought that was why you went to Thiodvik."

"It's too big a word for the commission I executed for my mother, and what else I did had nothing to do with politics. I wanted to do something in my own affairs."

"In Thiodvik?"

"Yes. I wanted to see the queen. You know that she's my father's cousin. She was very intimate with him, and was very kind to me."

"Well, how did she receive you?"

"I didn't see her."

"Why?"

"I went first to her German secretary, my tutor's brother, a good old friend, and he strongly advised me against the step."

"You shouldn't have listened to him."

"He gave me good reasons. It seems that the queen has been set against us."

"In your place, I should not have heeded these tale-bearers."

"Yes, perhaps I was too soon discouraged. But what could I do? When one is left without any sort of guidance, and feels one's way so insecure——"

"Don't worry. I dare say you've not lost much. I can't exactly see what the Queen of Gotheim could have done for you," said Nicoline.

"Can't you? Why, the Grand Duke Hilarius looks up to his sister-in-law. She is the only human being who has any influence with him. If the queen said a word to him in our favour, he would recognize me as his nephew, and would make the Vienna uncle let me have my father's allowance. And I can count on justice and kindness from the queen. Her favourite daughter married a man who is not of the blood royal."

"Well, if you knew all that, you should have carried out your purpose and seen the queen."

He looked down, and said nothing. They walked in silence for a time along the Boulevard Haussmann.

"You don't ask how I've been getting on?" began Nicoline, at length.

"Why didn't you write to me, even once?" returned Siegfried.

"Well, I really don't know, exactly. Perhaps because I didn't quite know how to write to you. And then I thought you'd only be away three days. And when it was longer, and I heard nothing from you, I didn't know what had become of you."

"A word from you would have done me so much good."

"Have you heard nothing about me?"

"How could I? From whom?"

"Haven't you seen any of the Paris papers—the *Figaro*?"

"No."

"Or the Thiodvik papers?"

"Yes."

"And was there nothing about me in them?"

"About you?"

"Thank you for giving me a lesson in modesty. I see what fame is—fame which went to my head at the first draught. All the newspapers were full of me for two days. I imagined that the whole world was occupied with me, and you know nothing about it, and haven't even seen my name once. That's a wholesome experience."

"I don't understand—you must forgive me. I merely glanced at the papers. What was it?"

She smiled, and said nothing.

"How did the papers come to mention you?" continued Siegfried. "It can't be anything disagreeable or you wouldn't look so pleased. What is it?"

"You've quite forgotten the concert?"

"The concert! Of course! You sang——"

"Yes, I sang, and his highness Prince Siegfried, wasn't there. And it was a success that might well turn a girl's head. The hall was packed full with the best audience in Paris—I mean the most discriminating. And they were like mad. When I sang my first song, 'Cette nuit j'ai revu le palais de mon père,' from Gluck's *Iphigenia*, a stir went through the hall, a murmur of surprise, then such applause as I should have thought impossible from an audience of that kind. I was in excellent voice and extraordinarily courageous. I did not feel the least shy. I appeared *incognito* as it were. No one knew me. And nothing depended on it. At least, so I thought, but I discovered my error later. For if I had known, I should have suffered from stage-fright. My turn came again at the end of the second part. The good signora had saved me for *la bonne bouche*. It was the dying song from *Othello*. Signora Conti will have nothing to do with Wagner. Music ends for her with the classical composers and the Italians. When I entered, there was a deathlike stillness, then a double round of applause. That had not occurred before during the concert. When I had finished no one moved, and all cried out, 'Encore! Encore!' and would not be silenced. But in such things Signora Conti is not to be moved. In fact, she never permits a repetition. But that made no matter. 'The people are infatuated with you,' she said, half irritably, half gladly. 'Now, for Heaven's sake, go back so that they may be quiet. But no more Othello. I'll have no encore. Sing the air, "Queen of the Night."' I did, and with what success you can't imagine. Then up came haughty American ladies, and desired to make my acquaintance, and loaded me with the most exaggerated compliments. Another Patti, another Jenny Lind, that was the least of them. And after them came reporters,

among them your friend Coppée, who claimed me as an old acquaintance, and they rained questions on me, and my answers, when I did answer, were written down; but Signora Conti spread her wings over me like a brooding hen, and exclaimed, 'No interview,' and hunted them all away."

The words flowed from her lips in an apparently inexhaustible stream, and her shining eyes, beaming expression, and smiling mouth, showed how the remembrance delighted her.

"Signora Conti is a sympathetic creature," she continued. "I naturally wrote to my mother the same evening, and I got an answer the day before yesterday, and she said she might perhaps have thought my account exaggerated; but Signora Conti had confirmed it all. Just think, she wrote to my mother, and never said a word to me. That's something far beyond the usual interest shown by a teacher. The next day the class received me with clapping of hands, and presented me with a wreath—that's something for your rivals to do, isn't it? And Signora Conti handed me a sheaf of newspapers, and said before them all, 'I ought to hide it all from you, but perhaps you had better see it. Read it, but don't lose your head. It's all rubbish. The reporters know nothing about art. Your pretty face attracted them, and so they exaggerate blindly. It would be a very serious matter if you believed them. You're very far from perfect yet. You've a great deal more to learn.' My good old Signora Conti! As if I didn't know that. Then came letters offering me engagements for evening parties. But Signora Conti won't hear of that. Nor will I. I have been asked for my photograph for publication. The Diesa papers copied the Paris reports, and our *Anzeiger* hopes that our director will not let the rising star escape him. I laughed heartily over that. The good people of Diesa think they are justified in inheriting such an usufruct free of expense. My mother has let herself be so used. That is enough. The daughter will act very differently. Besides, there are other people besides our director who

do not intend to let the rising star escape them. You won't believe it, but yesterday an *impresario* really and truly came to see me, a flesh-and-blood *impresario*, who offered me an engagement for several years, for my whole life, if I would. The man did not inspire confidence; he prejudiced me against him, for he tried to set me against Signora Conti. He had first been to her, he told me, but she had summarily dismissed him, because she intended to keep me as her own property—such absurdity! I should never settle anything without consulting Signora Conti and my mother. But I was immensely amused. My first offer! I told the man to leave me the terms of the contract. I shall not answer him, nor see him again. But I shall keep the paper as a souvenir. It will form a landmark in my life. Aren't you curious to read it?"

"What—what do you wish?" asked Siegfried, waking out of his thoughts.

"I talk and talk, and you don't listen to a word," grumbled Nicoline, with a pout.

"I do, Nicoline, I do," he assured her lamely.

But she was right. The details of her story gave him no pleasure. They slipped away from him. He had only the impression that she was full of herself and of an experience that had no value in his eyes. Apparently, during all these days he had had no place in her thoughts. That humiliated and annoyed him, and his injured feelings took an ignoble revenge in depreciating the interests that now occupied the girl.

"Pah!" he thought, "Stage gossip, theatrical anxieties, comedians, vanity—already! That's all far below the place on which I stand."

He did not know how haughty he looked as these thoughts passed through his mind. Nicoline, with her sensitiveness and intelligence, read them in his look and manner as in an open book.

"Forgive me, Siegfried," she said, proudly controlling her feelings, "it was presumption on my part to think you could be interested in my little affairs." She wanted to add, "I can't put myself in the same category as

political generals and great queens," but she repressed the ill-natured words.

"You are wrong, Nicoline," replied Siegfried, seriously. "Everything that concerns you interests me deeply. Only you oughtn't to blame me if it saddens me a little, that in all your success you should have thought so little, perhaps not at all of me."

"You're wrong, Siegfried. I thought of you so much, that the whole hall full of people was indifferent to me because you weren't there. Why weren't you there? I shall always believe that you could have put off going to Thiodvik for three days, if you had really wished it."

He could not actually deny that, and so said nothing.

"You've never heard me sing, have you?" asked Nicoline, after a pause.

"Yes, I have. Don't you remember? The day after your arrival when you sang the 'Müllerlied' to your mother's accompaniment."

"Oh, that was child's play. I mean something dramatic."

"I recognized the bell-like tones of your voice," he assured her.

"I had had no training. My voice was like an uncut precious stone. Now it's quite different."

"I should certainly like to admire it. But how and where? I can't go to you——"

Nicoline blushed.

"I must wait to hear you, till I can buy the right at the box-office."

"No, you needn't wait till then. Signora Conti has fixed her last pupil's concert before the holidays for the end of July. It's a sort of final examination with a view to engagements. I shall take pains to show what I can do. Signora Conti will be delighted to send you an invitation if you express a wish to come. I tell you now, so that you may be able to arrange it in case you have to go to Gotheim again."

He received her stab with an inclination of the head.

Again they walked on awhile in silence.

"Final examination," said Siegfried, at last. "That points, perhaps, to the end of your stay in Paris."

"Not perhaps, but certainly. I can't accept the severe sacrifice my mother is making any longer, and I feel myself fledged."

"So near! Scarcely two months!"

"Yes. Time flies. When I think that I've been away from my mother for eight months. And I must make the greatest use of the few weeks that remain. For things are now serious. I must study at least eight or ten parts. I am working with M. Courtois of the Grand Opera to whom Signora Conti recommended me. Then I have to take lessons in elocution and deportment, the first with a professor at the Conservatoire, the second with the ballet-master of the Grand Opera. It seemed to me at first rather absurd, but Signora Conti assures me that it is absolutely necessary. It takes up my whole day. And when I have no lessons, I must learn my parts by heart. In a word——"

"In a word, my poor Nicoline, you're leading a terrible life."

"It's not easy, and great ideals are not attained without effort. Henceforth, I can't give up the afternoons to our pleasant walks——"

He looked at her in alarm. "Do I rightly understand? You won't any more——"

"I can't. I haven't time."

"And you can say that with so light a heart."

"You don't know whether it's with a light or a heavy heart. Let us be wise. We mustn't be sentimental. That was our agreement, wasn't it? What we wish for we must wish for earnestly. You didn't hesitate to remain away from me for a week when you thought it necessary for your affairs. That's not a reproach," she said quickly, when he seemed about to reply; "indeed, it called forth a certain respect from me, for it shows energy. But you must understand that I can be as hard on myself as you on yourself."

"I shan't see you any more——"

"I haven't said that. There are still Sunday afternoons."

"That'll only make nine or ten meetings."

"We must be satisfied with those, Siegfried?"

"And then——"

"Then, yes, then——"

"Separation."

"Serious life's work."

"To forget."

"Are you speaking of yourself or of me?" she asked.

He did not seem to have heard the question. "You won't have much time for thinking of me when you are quite given up to your work."

"It's not in our power to regulate our struggle with circumstances. Would it be any better if I were not to work? I know what I am striving for. If I succeed in what I undertake, I shall soon be mistress of my fate—and then you know what we decided."

They had now reached the Arc de Triomphe, and Nicoline bent her steps towards the avenue Wagram, which led to her house. They only spoke in monosyllables. Nicoline had a dozen newspaper cuttings with her, but she waited in vain for Siegfried to express a wish to see them. He never thought of them, and she was too much hurt by his indifference to offer them to him; each thought there was reason to complain of the other, and so their parting was cool and strained.

They had only been separated a week, and it seemed as if years lay between their parting and meeting. The events of that important week had shown them both that their paths lay wide apart, and would nowhere meet, and that their own interests occupied them more than thoughts of one another.

Meanwhile the baroness's affairs grew from bad to worse. Without exactly cutting her, Madame Abeille treated her with distinct coldness. She apparently shared General Ménard's opinion that she had not acted in good faith. Madame Abeille's whole circle, the baroness's social support in Paris, was infected with

her mood, and the altered circumstances made themselves felt sensibly in the weeks between the *Vernissage* at the Salon and the *Grand Prix*, weeks usually crowded with invitations.

Nothing but news of disaster came from Vienna. Osterburg informed her that the upper Court had finally thrown out her claim to be entered in the Land Register as Princess of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level. It established the judgment regarding the personal rank of Prince Albrecht's widow, that she had, according to the Loewenstein-Franka family law, no claim to the rank and title of a member of that royal house. There could be no appeal against the decision. Only the head of the State could change it by his own power. Osterburg made an attempt to get at the Emperor. The civil cabinet curtly directed the appellant to apply to the reigning Prince of Loewenstein-Franka, who was alone concerned in the matter.

So that campaign was lost, and the baroness, after six months' worry and a heavy outlay, was just as far as she had been at the time of Osterburg's visit. The ingenious lawyer did not, however, rest long, and proposed a new plan of campaign. He offered to compose a memorial which should prove that the principle of equality of birth was broken by the marriage of Duke Ditmar with the Princess Level, since that lady was not a member of the high nobility in the sense of the regulations of the German Federal Diet of 1815, 1818, and 1825. Likewise the Austrian branch of the Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka family, in consequence of its descent from an ancestress of unequal birth, was not a part of the whole family, and so the equality of birth principle could no longer be enforced in regard to the wives of princes of that branch. The impression conveyed by the Charter of Institution of the Loewenstein-Level entail, was that the princess and Prince Siegfried were justified in demanding the widow's jointure and allowance which was set aside for widows and princes of the younger lines. He would send this memorial to the courts and governments of Franka, Gotheim, Atlantis, and Hageland, and to the reigning houses related to them.

If that produced no effect, he would try publicity, and send the memorial to all the great newspapers of the world, to all the most distinguished liberal and socialist members of parliament, and would take care that the journalistic and parliamentary discussion of the affair should not cease until it was settled according to the sense of right, and to modern views. It should be his life's task to fight for the rights of a royal widow to the end, and he was willing to sacrifice his peace, his professional income, his position to the cause. His letter concluded with the request for a larger advance for the printing expenses of the memorial, which was to appear in both German and French.

The baroness acceded to the new proposition without hesitation. But she sent no money, and asked Osterburg to let her have his work in manuscript, and said that she would look after the French translation and the printing in both languages in Paris. As there was now no longer any purpose in being a landlord in Vienna, and as the purchase of the house had proved so bad an investment, she commissioned Osterburg to dispose of her share of it as soon as possible, even if a small loss should be entailed. In this way she hoped to recoup herself for the 50,000 gulden, or at least in great part. Her peculiarly versatile mind now saw only that result of the wreck of Osterburg's first plan of campaign, and she almost congratulated herself on it.

One afternoon, soon after his return from Thiodvik, Siegfried was walking alone on the Boulevards; he had taken to the practice since he had been obliged to give up his daily meetings with Nicoline. It was one of the first warm days of June, and the *cafés* and beer-houses were full of loungers idly enjoying iced absinth or beer. As Siegfried passed Pousset's, he glanced at the unknown faces of the guests sitting in the open air in a melancholy, unsympathizing fashion, when suddenly one of them arrested his gaze. He was a middle-aged man, dressed in a light flannel travelling-suit, a cheap straw hat on his head, his ungloved hands folded over the ivory handle of the walking-stick he held between his knees.

He had a long, brown, somewhat flabby face, with a short beard, and a long, level, light-brown moustache Siegfried was so surprised that he involuntarily stopped and stared at him. His first impulse was to go up to the man. Then he saw that a lady was sitting with him at the table on which stood a large glass of beer and a small one, and he felt that he had better not speak to him or seem to see him. But meanwhile the man had seen him, and, although he looked surprised, seemed in no way desirous of avoiding a meeting, but nodded to him cordially and signed to him with his hand. With bared head Siegfried went up quickly to him, and said, with a low bow—

"Your Imperial Highness here! What an unexpected meeting!"

"S-sh!" said the man, and introducing Siegfried to his companion, said, "Baron von Gronendal, Prince Albrecht of Loewenstein's son. Join us, if you've nothing better to do," he added, drawing up an empty chair. When Siegfried, had taken his place at the table, the man continued, "Let me introduce my wife, Frau Heeremann."

Despite his self-control, Siegfried looked more astonished than ever.

"Your Imperial Highness," he stammered, bowing to the lady; "I had no idea—I have seen nothing about it in the papers—I am quite ashamed——"

The man vastly enjoyed Siegfried's confusion. "Yes," he said gaily, "we managed that very cleverly. So far we've escaped all stupid gossip. I hope we shall continue to do so. I heard in Vienna that you went in for journalism. Now, no gossiping! Entire silence!" And, smilingly, he held up a threatening finger.

"Your Imperial Highness, you may rest assured——"

"One thing, above all. Have done with 'Imperial Highness.'"

"Of course—incognito!"

"No, my dear fellow, I'm no longer an Imperial Highness, I'm Herr Ernst Heeremann, now and for ever."

"I don't understand——"

"It's quite easy. I've renounced my rank and title, and the Emperor has accepted my resignation."

Siegfried turned crimson. For a moment the thought flew through his head—

"He's making fun of you, he's burlesquing your struggle for rank and title." The man who was comfortably drinking his beer amid the crowd was the Archduke Ernst Ferdinand of Umbria, the younger brother of the Archduke August Ferdinand, who had once been engaged to the Princess Hedwig, his father's sister. In spite of the ten years' difference in age, Archduke Ernst Ferdinand had been very intimate with Prince Albrecht, frequently hunted with him, often visited him at Franka, and treated Siegfried much more kindly than was the custom with the rest of his father's relatives and acquaintances.

The archduke was regarded as the most gifted member of the family, and was perhaps on that account not specially loved by his relations. As a young captain he boldly desired to introduce some innovations, into the army, and was immediately dismissed. His military career being thus destroyed, he entered into politics, and made a speech at a party banquet after which he was requested to travel for a time on the other side of the Atlantic. He refused to marry the princess who had been chosen for him, and was therefore for some time banished from Court. In short, he had altogether proved himself an obstinate independent character, who would not submit to the tyranny of his caste. He was also a witty caricaturist and a composer of epigrams which publicly scandalized the Court, and privately delighted it. He might be counted on to provide amusement.

"It is extraordinary," murmured Siegfried, and his countenance darkened, "that such an unprecedented event—it is, I take it, unprecedented—can have so escaped me."

"You need not wonder about that. It has not yet been made public. As a last favour I got the Emperor to promise that my renunciation should not appear in the Vienna papers until I had left Europe." He spoke quite seriously and calmly. It could not be affectation.

"Your Imperial Highness is leaving Europe?"

"Do leave off that. Yes, my dear fellow, we've been wandering round and enjoying life for a fortnight. At least I have," said the former Archduke, with a bright smile at his wife.

"I, too, dearest," she replied, and smiled back at him happily.

"We've three days more, and then we take ship at Bordeaux for Patagonia."

"For Patagonia?"

"For Patagonia. It's a beautiful country, my dear fellow. We've bought land there, and hope, as pioneers of civilization but without over-civilization, to live there as happily as mortals can. But, come! drink a glass of beer with us." He called the waiter and gave the necessary order. Siegfried, half-dazed, looked at the former Archduke's wife and scarcely knew what to make of it all. The lady was dressed with studied simplicity, she was fair, young, fresh, pretty, with mischievous eyes, and a happy, cheerful expression, a delightful Vienna type, and still, from her appearance and the few words she had so far spoken, not to be classified. Who could she be? Also a member of the nobility who, for a similar paradoxical whim had descended from the heights? Or a nobody?

"To your good health!" said the Imperial Prince when the waiter had brought the beer, and clinked glasses with Siegfried. "Do you know that I've only come to know the delicious flavour of beer since I've been a free man. My rank formerly prevented me from going, like an ordinary man, into a good tavern, and buying a draught fresh from the tap. My servants only provided me with stale bottled stuff. Hot coffee, and cold beer, those are the things we can't have so long as we stand too high above men to enter their *cafés* and taverns. I was forty before I came to know what a pleasant place the world can be if you only wear a straw hat on your head instead of a crown. But I'm talking too much about myself. I'm so full of my own impressions that my words run away with me. The more so because you're the first acquaintance I've spoken to since I left

Vienna. I avoided everybody. Now it's your turn. How have you been getting on since your father's death?"

"Your Imperial——"

"No, Heeremann."

"Herr von Heeremann—"

"Not von Heeremann, simply Heeremann."

"What? You've not even kept to the nobility?"

"My dear fellow," said the new Herr Heeremann, smiling, and tapping his neighbour cheerfully on the shoulder, "if I had wanted to be a nobleman, I could be an Archduke. Mark you, I am Ernst Heeremann, nothing but Heeremann, a Patagonian farmer. Tell me about yourself and your mother."

Siegfried spoke stammeringly and embarrassed. He could not quite find the right way to behave towards this Herr Heereman, who was always an Imperial Highness in his eyes. He informed him of his mother's bad health, of her Parisian acquaintances, of his own loneliness and lack of aim. He said nothing of their efforts to obtain recognition of their position in the Loewenstein-Franka family. How could he to a man who had renounced an Archduke's crown?

"I should like to go and see your mother," said Herr Heeremann.

"Ah, that would be very kind—will you both come and dine."

"Yes. To-night then. But tell the baroness to receive us like the simple honeymoon couple that we are. That's the one condition. And we must be alone with you two, and must leave early because we have two seats at the Français. Out there my wife will have to do without the play, and so I can't let her miss her last visit to the theatre."

"Exactly as you like," replied Siegfried. He asked where they were staying, and was given the address of an obscure hotel in the Champs Élysées. Then he said good-bye, and hurried home to tell his mother the astonishing news.

When the baroness, who was out driving, returned, and

heard the Archduke Ernst Ferdinand's story from Siegfried, she could not keep calm.

"If all he says is true, the poor Archduke is apparently"—she tapped her forehead expressively with her forefinger. "He was always rather strange." She was chiefly curious about his wife. Who could she be? How could she find out? Never had she felt more bitterly than now how completely she had lost touch with the circle to which she claimed to belong.

Count Laporte and an American family were expected to dinner. Janusz had to take a cab and make the baroness's apologies. She dressed herself as for great occasions, and the lights, the silver, glass, service, and menu were in keeping.

Herr and Frau Heeremann arrived with royal punctuality. The former Archduke wore ordinary evening dress without any decorations, neither the golden fleece, nor the star of St. Stephen. The baroness welcomed his wife with some reserve, but overwhelmed him with cordiality. He was the first royalty who had been to see her since the last visit of Prince Johann of Diesa.

"Your Imperial Highness, I am delighted to see you again after so long a time."

"Very good of you, I'm sure, my dear friend, but hasn't the baron told you?"

"Your Imperial Highness, you must forgive me if I can't take the joke seriously. In Lindenheim days the little masquerade would have amused me, but since that time I've unhappily grown gloomy and depressed."

"But what do you mean, my dear Josephine? Joke? Masquerade? It's complete, adamant earnest, so far as this life is earnest."

"Your Imperial Highness, you can't change your blood nor deny it. I don't know if you can be by birth anything else than an Archduke; but I know you can only cease to be one at death."

"Now, if I'm not a living proof to the contrary, you must take it as you please."

The baroness complimented him on his appearance. Smilingly, he stroked his long, fair moustache.

"I've grown younger, eh? Yes, my dear friend, that is what happens when an old worn-out Archduke dies, and is born again as a fresh, new Heeremann."

She turned to the young woman, and asked her about her travels, and her impressions of Paris, avoiding addressing her directly, not knowing what title to give her. The accent with which Frau Heeremann replied made the baroness say—

"You are Viennese?"

"Almost," she answered. "I come from Schönbrunn."

"From Schönbrunn," flashed through the baroness's mind. "Perhaps an Archduchess, a cousin."

At length Herr Heeremann satisfied her burning curiosity.

"My little wife," he said, "is the daughter of the head-gardener at Schönbrunn——"

"Ah!" the baroness could not refrain from exclaiming. "And was reared by her father with the rest of his precious flowers in the conservatory."

"Oh no," retorted his wife, "I grew up in the open-air, the right place for an ordinary field and meadow plant."

Janusz announced that dinner was served, and Heeremann gave the baroness his arm. She was hurt that he should wear no decoration. After they were seated, she turned to him, and said—

"Your Imperial Highness is not wearing your Fleece because you are going to the theatre?"

"My Fleece? But, my dear friend, how can simple farmer Heeremann possess a Fleece? My orders have been left in Vienna with my rank and title. The only fleece I shall in future possess will be that of the sheep I hope to rear."

"And you consented to this renunciation, madam?" asked the baroness.

"I wasn't asked," said Frau Heeremann, brightly. "It was all settled and finished before my husband asked me to marry him. Besides, it matters nothing to me," she added, with an affectionate look at her husband, "I wanted to marry him, not his orders."

He stretched his hand across the table and pressed hers.

"That is more than all my brothers and cousins could say of themselves, isn't it, my dear friend?"

"My angel prince could have said it of himself," replied the baroness, simply.

Her guest became serious. "Yes," he said thoughtfully, "your Albrecht also knew how to procure a slice of happiness for himself in this world."

"Which Siegfried and I are paying for now," complained the baroness.

Heeremann gave her a swift look, but took no notice of the allusion.

"His method was not sufficiently radical. If you want to arrange your life comfortably you must live on the same story of the house as your wife. You above, she below, that never works."

"And so your Imperial Highness couldn't find a corner for your charming wife in your story."

"Oh, I so much prefer to live on the ground-floor," exclaimed Frau Heeremann.

"I didn't try," replied Heeremann. "But you musn't imagine that my wife is responsible for my decision. You are painting some romantic picture; but, I assure you, it's all plain prose. I had reached the age when a man begins to think about himself, and his aim in life. As a young fellow I had plenty of bees in my bonnet. What dreams I dreamed! I was going to move the world. I regarded myself as a power of nature, to say nothing more. I was a little boy when my parents were driven out of their country. I determined to set up our throne in Umbria again, and to make our house among the first in the world. I never doubted for a moment that I wasn't capable of it. I learned and served with passionate enthusiasm. I attacked everything eagerly. But each time the thing took shape it was torn from my hand, and my fingers were well rapped. It took me some time to understand that a prince has no right to be or do anything himself. But when, at length, I did understand, I drew my own deductions. I've no talent for being the caryatid of a throne, or a walking gentleman in Court

ceremonials, or a reserve for the succession, with a million to one against the probability of ever attaining it. And since a man only lives once, I implored the Emperor to let me live as I pleased. Annie had nothing to do with it. I made up my mind directly my regiment was taken from me. Annie is simply my reward for bravely carrying out what I planned."

Siegfried followed his neighbour's line of argument with peculiar inward excitement, but the baroness looked discontented. The Archduke's views were a universe apart from hers! She asked, turning aside from the point at issue—

"But how did your Imperial Highness come to choose the name Heeremann? That doesn't occur in the title, or does it come somewhere in the *et cetera?*"

Heeremann laughed.

"You won't give up your *incognito* idea, my dear friend. No. Heeremann was the maiden name of Annie's mother. She comes of a family of village smiths in Westphalia, and declares that the founder of her family was present at the surrender of the armourer of Wittekind. It amuses me to fasten my posterity to an honest Saxon sword-cutler."

Siegfried thought, "It is surely of more worth to be allied with him who swung the sword than with him who forged it." But he said nothing.

"May I venture to ask if your Imperial Highness has quarrelled with the family?" inquired the baroness.

"Not at all," replied Heeremann. "We've just drifted apart. And as I'm not going to stay in Europe, and we shall have no further communication, it doesn't matter to either side. But my eldest brother won't give me up. I believe he'd like to follow my example. I dissuaded him. He's too old to begin life again. And he has no little wife to help him. But he wants to come and see me out there, and I've not the heart to refuse him."

The baroness gently shook her head. "Your Imperial Highness, it's not for me to criticise your actions, but I don't know, I ask myself if it's right towards one's children and one's children's children to deprive them

of the incomparable possession that we received from our fathers."

Heeremann became very serious. He was silent for a space, and stroked his long, fair moustache. Then he said, slowly, with pauses, like one dreaming aloud, "I asked myself the same question, my dear Josephine, and I found the answer. Incomparable possession! Yes, if it were. But I don't believe that any more. What have I got out of my Imperial Highnesship? Always to stand on the stage—to be looked at through a thousand opera-glasses—to be bound in limb and tongue—that's no life! If only something could be made of it! Then it might all be endured. But you can't do anything with it. A prince should have no ambition—at least, none beyond the patronage of a charity ball, or of a patriotic rifle-club. Otherwise he'll come to grief. I got terribly tired of always standing on parade in the scorching sun, and fled into the shade. That is what is precious, my dear woman—shade. To have no heed taken of you. To get out of the glass house. To live inside opaque walls. I hope Annie will give me little boy Heeremanns and little girl Heeremanns. I shall love them dearly, and rejoice that they can grow up in obscurity."

Frau Heeremann turned crimson and looked at the speaker, whom she evidently reverenced as a higher being, with shining eyes.

"To reign—yes, that's worth the trouble," he continued. "But only one of us can do that, and the other three dozen and a half reservists can only look on. It's not so bad to be a legitimate king in exile, if you have the right sort of temperament. But if you are neither a reigning king, nor an exiled king, what's the good of being a highness? Then it's much nicer to sow grain in Patagonia, to breed sheep, and to do or let alone as you please."

"Do you share these ideas, madam?" asked the baroness.

"With my whole heart," exclaimed the young woman.

"Now, I'm curious to know what the descendants you wish for will think."

"I'm not afraid of their verdict," said Heeremann, smiling. "I'll show you a hidden place in my heart that I mostly keep locked—the romantic corner. As boy and youth, I really thought that I belonged to the gods, and was quite different in body and soul from an ordinary human being. Later, I began to have doubts about my divinity. That was a very painful state of things. Think how uncomfortable Jupiter would have found it, if, standing behind the altar in his temple, he had always had to torment himself with the question: Am I a god? or am I only a god of stone that any hammer can knock to pieces? I am making a great experiment. I shan't see the result; but that doesn't matter, the idea is particularly enchanting. I go from the light into darkness. If my descendants stay there, then it's the right place for them, for then it is proved that there's nothing special in us or them. But if we are something special, and it's possible, no one can know for certain, then one of my far-off descendants will rise up again, and become something great. It will be his right to rule, he will have risen again through his own strength."

A brief pause ensued, during which Heeremann seemed to be following a thought. Then he gave a short laugh.

"It might even be better still. Our family may use itself up, and perhaps die out—we live such unnatural and joyless lives that where are we to get vital strength? My descendants will develop out there through fresh blood and freedom into Patagonian giants, and they'll return to the old country and take the crown again, and one day there will be seen in the Hofburg a magnificent race of powerful men more like their ancestors than my legendary ancestor Radbot. And I, just because I withdrew from the dynasty, shall be the upholder of the dynasty. Won't that be a splendid joke?"

The meal was over. The former Archduke took the baroness back to the drawing-room, and said suddenly, while he swallowed his sugarless black coffee—

"My dear friend Josephine, will you be very kind?"

"Your Imperial Highness——"

"You know we shan't get any music out there. Play me something for the very last time. Perhaps Chopin, as only you can play him. We shall carry the sound away as a souvenir."

The baroness was not particularly pleased. "I've hardly touched the piano for two years——"

"That doesn't matter. Quick, to the piano. I want it for my Annie."

It was no use. The baroness had to comply. If Herr Heeremann made the request, he was still very much the Archduke. When she sat down to the instrument her ambition revived, and she did her best, which was very good.

Frau Heeremann was enchanted and applauded loudly. Heeremann thanked her cordially, and said—

"Now something simple. I know you'll laugh at me; but play the Radetsky march and the Sambre-et-Meuse march. That's the finest march in the world. Then we'll go."

The baroness did as he asked. When the final notes of the warlike music had died away, Heeremann got up, pressed both the baroness's hands for a long time, and said—

"Farewell, my dear friend, I'm glad to have seen you. We shall think of you. You will forget us. I wish you every prosperity. The best is and remains the acknowledgment that happiness is something other than the vanities of the world."

In the hall he said to Siegfried who was helping Frau Heeremann on with her cloak—

"If you like, drive with us to the theatre."

The baroness had put her state carriage and two fat horses at their disposal.

On the way Heeremann began, "I did not like to say more for fear of worrying your mother. But I can speak to you as man to man. I have seen with real sorrow that since your father's death you have quarrelled with his family. You're on the wrong tack, my dear fellow. If you wish to protest against a morganatic marriage, you should not wait till the silver wedding. That's just a little late."

"I couldn't protest before I was born," replied Sieg-
ed. "I did as soon as I could."

"That may be. But you didn't do it the right way,
lieve me. You undertook something that's not easy.
ou can't annihilate the family of Loewenstein—Napoleon
arly annihilated the Bourbons. You can perhaps rise
ove the house of Loewenstein, but you can't enforce
ur reception into the family by law-suits. Take warn-
g. Don't spoil your life by what can never be carried
rough. Leave the Loewensteins alone, and become an
cestor yourself. It was never easier than it is to-day
r a young, strong, determined man to succeed. Look
und you—look how things go in the world to-day.
man who was a shoeblack is now a millionaire, and
sociates with the aristocracy as with his equals; another
s a little journalist in India and is now world-famous,
d if he's ill the greatest emperors in the world have
ily bulletins of his health telegraphed to them. And
s just the same in art, in politics, in everything. If
u're ambitious, make the name of Gronendal famous.
und a Gronendal dynasty by your own strength."

"Your Imperial Highness has too good an opinion of
I've no talents to make me a celebrated artist or
t. And as for founding a dynasty—I don't think that's
e done by one's own strength. That must be done
party, a revolution. I've no such ambition."

"What is your ambition?"

"To rank as my father's heir."

My dear boy, I mean well by you. Personality is
nportant thing, not the title. You can make quite
e a figure in the world as Baron von Gronendal, and
r easier for you than for a million others to bring
erything that's in you. How would you be more
ttle Prince Loewenstein-Franka who is nothing, and
thing, and can do nothing? You seem to me like a
ho fights to get a seat in a show that he imagines
nmensely fine. I come out from the show and tell
n't struggle to get in, it's not worth the trouble."
carriage stopped in front of the theatre. Heere-
d his wife parted cordially from Siegfried.

"Think of it well," said Heeremann to him, as he gave him his hand. "I've been in and come out, and I assure you it's not worth the trouble."

The remarkable resemblance between some of the Archduke's observations and those of Nicoline gave Siegfried so much to think of, that he felt the need of a long solitary walk. He dismissed the magnificent coachman, and returned home on foot.

BOOK V

With the first week of July came Dr. Osterburg's new account. It so excited the baroness that she fainted. The house, far from bringing any profit, needed some addition, and the allowance was swallowed up in law expenses, the cost of researches in the archives for the working up of the memorial, and similar things. Indeed, the account left a balance on the wrong side, and the baroness was in debt to her lawyer for a small sum. He sent the memorial, but that was scarcely a substitute for the sacrifice Osterburg required of her.

When the baroness was calmer, she gave Siegfried Osterburg's work to turn into French. She telegraphed to the lawyer to sell the house at once, and regretted that he had delayed the transaction, although she had told him to carry it out six weeks ago.

A few days later Osterburg humbly informed her—he never hurried about his answers—that a hasty sale in the middle of summer would be most disadvantageous. She desired him by wire to carry out her command. He obeyed, and in the middle of the month informed her that the sale was concluded. But he was sorry to say under most unfavourable conditions, namely, for a hundred thousand florins, just the sum of the mortgage. Her fifty thousand florins were thus gone to the last penny. The game was really over now. The blow completely undid the baroness. She was obliged to keep her bed for two days, and all the while moaned to Bertha, who was nursing her—

"What's to be done now, Bertha, what's to be done now?"

In vain the maid implored her not to worry about business so long as she was ill, but the baroness could not forget the miserable figures, and with torturing exactness she reckoned that there was just sufficient on which to live very carefully until the printer's bill fell due, and then, failing a miracle, she would be without food or shelter.

"There's no need of a miracle. Before it comes to such a pass, your highness must make it up with the family."

"Then I shall take a good big dose of chloral, and have rest," murmured the baroness, gloomily.

"Your highness would not be so wicked," exclaimed Bertha, crossing herself. "What about the prince? Your highness never thinks of him. He'll make every thing right."

"Yes, but how?" inquired the baroness.

"The prince must marry. You've often thought of that," replied Bertha.

The baroness said nothing, and remained sunk in thought. It was indeed time to carry out that plan, since all others had failed. She knew that since Christmas Siegfried and Nicoline had met nearly every day, she had heard that from many quarters, for they did not hide themselves, and acquaintances had seen them together in the streets and in the museums. She also knew that since Siegfried's return from Thiodvik, the meetings had ceased, for apparently his afternoons were free, and he spent them as formerly, with the Dormans, at the shooting-gallery, at race-meetings, or at home, and careful observation did not reveal where and when he saw Nicoline. She did not trouble herself about the cause of the change in their relations, she concluded that a coldness, perhaps a break, had arisen between the pair, and it took a load off her heart. Siegfried was free, and she need fear no resistance on his part if she sought to marry him advantageously, an event that would put an end to all their cares and struggles.

Formerly the baroness had seriously reckoned on the effect of Siegfried's personality. He showed himself with her at the theatres and the Hippodrome. He went to

"At homes" with her. The subscribers to the Grand Opera, to the Opéra Comique, and to the Français must at least know him by sight. His handsome person must strike them. He must make conquests.

The baroness's expectations were not fulfilled. They were indeed childish. Well-brought-up girls in Paris do not trouble themselves about a handsome and interesting stranger whom they see at the theatre. That intriguing women should observe him through their glasses, and try to attract his attention, did not help her in her purpose.

She had to learn that her circle could not provide what she wanted. Well-to-do people were to be met at Madame Abeille's, but there were no great heiresses, and a dowry of a hundred thousand or a million francs, which might suffice for the frequenters of Madame Abeille's drawing-room, would be useless to her. The Americans with whom she had relations were not of the highest class, and it rightly seemed to her useless to get into close relations with people whose real circumstances were their own secret. The connection with Count Laporte and the Dormans was equally fruitless. Everything depended on winning a prize, and nothing of the sort was to be come at there. Had her Bourbon brother-in-law received her, it would have been easy enough to find a brilliant match for Siegfried. But the prince and his wife had treated her haughtily and contemptuously, even worse than had the Queen of Atlantis, and since Prince Albrecht's death, the connection had been entirely broken off.

The fortune that she desired was to be found only in the highest financial circles, and among undoubted trans-Atlantic millionaires. With a little skill on her part, and goodwill on that of Siegfried, it did not seem a difficult thing to enter that society. But the baroness was too proud or too depressed to take the necessary steps. Her idea of her dignity forbade advances that might look like a business venture. Siegfried would thrust aside in horror the thought of intruding among insolent people who wanted none of him.

Another way reaching the desired goal must be found. The baroness was not in doubt as to what it should

be. When she was able to go out again, her first drive was to St. Antony of Padua, under whose special protection she put her projects, not of course without dedicating to him considerable gifts, as a preliminary, and promising a much larger gift when things were brought to a happy conclusion. Then she went to her Father confessor, a Father of the Assumption, a clever, worldly man, and told him unreservedly, as her confidence in him permitted, that she wished to marry her only son, who had just entered his twenty-fourth year. He had all the qualities, both physical and mental, calculated to make the most difficult young lady happy. Living under a democracy she was ready to make no inquiries as to the ancestry of the lady on whom her son would confer a ducal coronet, provided that the family was strictly honourable and belonged to the Church. She must, however, possess a dowry which would enable the young couple to live as beseemed near relatives of the greatest emperors and kings in the world. At the present moment she was quarrelling with them. But everything would undoubtedly right itself when Siegfried married well, and was independent, and could make a show that would do honour to the family. She knew the influence of her confessor, and his order, and did not doubt that he would be able to procure her what she wanted. As a true son of the Church, Siegfried would receive his wife with peculiar gratitude from its hands, and it was the Church's business to see that great fortunes did not fall into hands that would make a godless use of them. The prince would always regard his earthly possessions as property in trust for the benefit of the Holy Faith. The Father sifted the essential from the ornamental of the baroness's edifying harangue, and regarded its purpose as important. He praised her greatly for her pious frame of mind, promised to think the matter over, and let her know the result as soon as possible. He consulted the Father Superior, and then informed the baroness that he regarded the marriage of a prince of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level of such importance that it was far outside the province of a poor monk. Only the Nuncio of his Holiness or his Eminence

the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris could be of use in such great matters, preferably the latter, since he knew more of the French families than did His Excellency. He would put her in communication with his Eminence, and let her know when she could be received at the archiepiscopal palace.

The baroness began to speak of her indebtedness to the Order in case of any result, but the monk interrupted her, smiling, with the observation that he acted solely from the love of God.

Three days later, the baroness received a written communication from the archbishop's office, informing her that his Eminence, in accordance with her wish, would receive her the next day at eleven o'clock in the morning. She looked forward to the meeting with great excitement. But there was a difficulty to be overcome. Should she go alone or take Siegfried with her? It seemed to her necessary to introduce him to the cardinal, but she thought it hazardous to inform her son of the purpose of the visit before she knew whether the cardinal regarded her desire favourably. She preferred to act on her old principles: everything for him, nothing with him. In order to solve her doubts, she determined to consult the vicar-general. In the afternoon she drove alone in her state carriage to the archiepiscopal palace, and asked to see the vicar-general. She was taken to the high dignitary, who inquired kindly what she wished.

"Vicar-general, to-morrow, I have the privilege of offering my homage to his Eminence."

"I know, princess."

"Do you also know the reason of my visit?"

"I know that also, princess."

"Now, my son, who is chiefly concerned in the matter, knows nothing of this step. He had the misfortune to lose his father early, so that, failing the powerful protection of his royal highness, my deceased husband, I, the poor widow, must fulfil the parental duty to our child. As a Christian mother I shall do everything I can to see him worthily married. It might, however, be unpleasing to him to know that I am asking this holy assistance."

The vicar-general listened dutifully, and nodded agreement from time to time.

"I don't know whether to take my son with me to-morrow——"

"Of course," said the vicar-general, "the prince must be introduced to his Eminence."

"Naturally, but if I speak to his Eminence of the purpose of our visit, my son would learn——"

The vicar-general almost jumped out of his chair.

"What! princess!" he exclaimed loudly, "you've surely not that intention! I must entreat you, not a syllable on the subject, not a syllable."

"But——"

"It gives his Eminence great satisfaction to receive the pious princess, he is happy to make the acquaintance of a scion of an illustrious race, he will gladly support mother and son in their praiseworthy and deserving actions, and give them his blessing. His Eminence naturally knows nothing of other things. His high office claims all his thoughts. Other persons look after worldly matters. I have confidence in your delicacy of feeling, princess, that you will be careful not to allude to anything of the sort."

The baroness was somewhat surprised, but she thanked the vicar-general for his instructions, and asked whether she might hope for success, and if anything suitable was in view.

"Princess," replied the vicar-general, smiling, "present yourself and your son to his Eminence, then we will think what to do further."

The baroness informed Siegfried at dinner that she intended to take him the next morning to see the cardinal archbishop of Paris. Since he looked much surprised, she continued—

"There is no court here. Your uncle Bourbon will have nothing to do with us. The Republican drawing-rooms are not the right ones for us. You felt that to be so, and I own that you were right. The archiepiscopal palace is the only place where you can hope to meet nice people. Therefore, I deem it necessary to introduce you there."

Siegfried thanked his mother for her consideration, and his tone was more cordial than usual.

The baroness and Siegfried arrived at the palace with regal punctuality. The baroness was dressed entirely in black, a sapphire cross her only ornament. A young *abbé* led them to the vicar-general, who at once took them to the cardinal's room, and remained present during the interview.

At the baroness's entrance, the cardinal rose from his writing-table, advanced to meet her, and gave his ring to be kissed, first to her and then to Siegfried. The appearance of the fair handsome young giant seemed to surprise and please him. He signed to the baroness to sit down on a somewhat stiff Empire sofa, and Siegfried on a chair, and after the presentation by the vicar-general, who then respectfully seated himself a little apart, said—

"Your highness, I am very glad to see you and your noble son here. I know your piety and am convinced the prince will imitate so holy an example."

"Your Eminence," replied the baroness, "holy Church has been my support in all my troubles; and my life has been full of troubles. I want my son also to have the protection of the Church and its prince."

The vicar-general cleared his throat.

"The Church," replied the cardinal, "is a good mother to all her children. She rewards faith with faith, and he who obeys her finds his salvation in her. Prince, providence, as I rejoice to see, has richly endowed you with its gifts, and I doubt not a beautiful soul dwells in so fair a form."

Siegfried thanked the prince of the Church for his good opinion.

"I am sorry," said the cardinal, "that I never had the opportunity of making Prince Albrecht's acquaintance.

The baroness, who took this remark as a slight reproach, interrupted respectfully—

"Your Eminence, he always intended to wait on you, but God disposed otherwise. He was taken from me soon after we settled in Paris."

The cardinal made a deprecatory wave of the hand, as if in apology, and began to talk to Siegfried. He inquired about his education, his travels, his impressions of Paris. He received the brief but intelligent replies with visible satisfaction, and said—

"My son, it gives me the greatest pleasure to make your acquaintance. The blood of a great saint whom I have always held in special honour flows in your veins. Few historical events gave holy Church more pain and grief than the unfortunate lapse of your illustrious family. So much the greater its joy at your grandfather's return to its bosom. You see how the Lord has blessed your branch since he found the right course again. As apostates, your family would never have placed on its heads the crown of Atlantis, or of Hageland. I allow myself the hope that the repentance of a three hundred years' error by one branch may have some importance for the future decisions of the whole family. Meanwhile, every Catholic owner of the great name of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka is especially dear to the Church. I hope, my son, to see you again from time to time."

The Cardinal rose, gave the baroness, whose tears were running down her cheeks, and then Siegfried his hand to kiss, bestowed his blessing on them, and accompanied them almost to the door. The vicar-general, who took them to the top of the staircase, congratulated the baroness on the excellent impression she had made on his Eminence, and answered her inquiring glance with a smile that seemed to promise much.

In the carriage, Siegfried said, "He actually called me his son twice."

"I heard it with joy and gratitude," replied his mother. "I feel that we have gained a valuable friend in the cardinal. It was one of the many and serious negligences of your poor father that he did not wait on this prince of the Church when we settled in Paris."

The same afternoon, the cardinal-archbishop's card was left at the Villa Josephine, together with that of the vicar-general. The latter had written below his name, "repeats his congratulations of the morning, and will always be glad

to see your highness any Monday or Friday morning between ten and eleven."

As it was Tuesday, she had to wait for three whole days, in torturing impatience. On Friday she went to the palace. The vicar-general's ante-room was already full of people. Clergymen, nuns, some ladies and a gentleman were sitting there. When the baroness was announced, the vicar-general received her without delay.

"How are matters going, vicar-general?" the baroness began at once.

"Princess, I am delighted to be able to inform you that your son made an excellent impression on His Eminence."

"Ah!"

"I think he may be able to help us in settling him."

"That's a great relief. May I venture to ask if you have anything actually in view?"

"H'm! Anything actually in view?" He seemed to be considering. "Perhaps. We know a young lady, a pattern of modesty and piety, well educated, charitable, and of pleasing appearance. If it is the will of Providence to grant the prince her hand, they will make a remarkable pair."

"And—is the pecuniary situation——"

"Something like fifty millions in estates, houses, and French Rentes," said the vicar-general, carelessly. "And an only child, too."

At the mention of the sum the baroness turned very red. She closed her eyes for a moment in enthusiastic indulgence of a brilliant dream.

"The young lady is French?" she asked, when she again opened her eyes.

"Certainly, princess."

"Of good family?"

"Princess, we are only acquainted with good families."

"Forgive me, vicar-general. Your description much attracts me to the girl. How are we to enter into relations with the family? Shall we meet them anywhere, or——"

"I must just say one thing. The family is not of particularly distinguished origin. The father is the architect of his great fortune. He went to South Africa as a young man, and after a few years returned a millionaire."

"Oh! He—is not in business still?"

"Oh no. He is a *rentier*." After a pause, he continued, "The mother, to be quite frank, was a simple work-girl, a milliner, I've heard it said. But she only kept a milliner's shop in Johannesburg for a very short time. No one in Europe knew her at that stage."

The baroness looked troubled. "That is indeed rather —rather—but the parents' manners are——"

"Perfectly correct. They are received in the very best society, and fit in with it quite well, chiefly through their elegance and liberality."

"In that case," murmured the baroness, "the parents won't expect very much——"

"I beg your pardon," replied the vicar-general, emphatically; "the parents expect a great deal, and with a perfect right. The young lady's father has been recommended by his Eminence to the Holy Father to be raised to a rank of which his conduct and his works make him worthy. When he is made a Roman Count by the Holy Father's favour, he will be everybody's equal."

The baroness bent her head in silence.

"To complete the integrity of my statement, I must not omit to mention," continued the vicar-general with well-feigned indifference, "that the father is of Jewish extraction——"

The baroness uttered a low cry of astonishment. "Jewish——"

"Extraction, I say. The mother is of good Catholic descent. He himself is, of course, baptized, and has proved the firmness of his belief so often and so brilliantly, that no one has a right to doubt it. He warmly supports all our undertakings. He has founded both a monastery and a convent on his estates. He is never asked in vain for a bell or an altar-piece for a poor church. He is ever ready to make sacrifices for our schools, for our

press. Indeed I regard him as the pattern of a zealous Catholic."

"There's just one thing," the baroness ventured to object; "I do not know if my son will overcome the prejudice."

"I can't help that," drily returned the vicar-general. "It is not my duty to persuade, only to state facts. I cannot praise the attitude of hostility towards an Israelite who has found salvation. We grieve for the obstinate Talmud-Jews who remain in their soul-blindness. We must struggle with all our might against the atheistic cosmopolitan who despises his own belief. But we must receive as brothers the Jews who repent of the sins of their fathers. The Church teaches that, and we must abide by it."

The baroness lowered her eyes and said nothing. It was a matter of supreme indifference to her whether her daughter-in-law's father was of Jewish, Turkish, or Chinese extraction. She merely thought that she owed it to herself and her point of view to consider how a princess of Jewish extraction might affect the chances of reconciliation with the family.

In spite of his cleverness and his knowledge of the human mind, the vicar-general was unable to guess the baroness's real thoughts. He took her silence for opposition, and got up.

"Princess, I repeat, if what I have told you—and it was my duty to tell you—makes the connection undesirable, then we may regard our conversation as not having taken place."

The baroness kept her seat, and replied quickly: "But in no way, vicar-general. Your arguments fully convince me. I only asked if my son's social position will remain what it must remain——"

"Anxiety in that direction is quite unfounded. The family is well received everywhere. They are themselves very particular, in my opinion, too much so. You can imagine, princess, that the young lady has many suitors. The most distinguished names are at her feet. But the father is difficult. He will have nothing to say to foreign

nobility. He will also have nothing to say to any nobility which finds it necessary to gild its coat-of-arms. He will only ally himself with the highest and the most undoubted nobility of France, and you can understand that the very few available young men in that class do not find it necessary to seek a wife outside their own circle. Not even for the sake of half a hundred million. For they are rich enough in those circles; much richer than before the Revolution. Our friend does not know that. Few outsiders do know it. Of course, your son is a foreigner, but a prince of the blood royal cannot be compared with a Neapolitan duke or a Polish count. For the sake of such an illustrious name, the father will give up his fixed idea of only taking a member of the ancient landed aristocracy of France.

The baroness still sat on. She wished to come to some definite result.

"How is the introduction to be made, vicar-general?"

The priest sat down again. "The family is already at their villa in Trouville. They generally stay there until the commencement of September, the hunting season. Then they go to their castle on the Loire. The best thing would be for you and your son to go to Trouville at once. I will then tell you their name, and it will be easy for you to see the young lady with her parents on the beach, on the promenade, or at the theatre. If the prince is attracted by her appearance the formal introduction can follow. We have friends at Trouville with whom the family is acquainted. We will give you introductions to them, and thus the young people will have an opportunity of getting to know each other. I have no doubt that the young lady will find the prince sympathetic, if he pays her proper attention. The rest will come of itself. If the father likes the prince, he'll invite him for the hunting; at the castle they'll have an opportunity of becoming more intimate, and if all goes as we hope, the engagement will take place in the autumn."

"You'll tell me the name of the family, vicar-general."

"Of course, princess. And I shall also have the honour of giving you a letter of introduction to the widowed Countess de Rochenoire, and to the priest of Trouville. But first there is just one little formality to be gone through."

He got up, opened a small corner cupboard, and handed the baroness a paper.

"You will be good enough to sign your name here."

The baroness took the paper and read—

"We undertake within four weeks of the marriage of the undersigned with Miss "—here there was a blank space —"to pay to Maître Duplan du Poul de Ker, lawyer, practising in Paris, two million francs."

"Two million!" murmured the baroness, horrified.

"It is almost a year's income for the young couple. But they can easily spare it. They won't have many expenses the first year. And if the prince must pledge his own credit to fulfil the obligation, that will be no misfortune. Under those circumstances we have plenty of friends who will help him, and he can take two or three years to pay off the debt, so that it won't be a great burden."

The baroness seemed as if hypnotized by the magnitude of the sum, and repeated almost unconsciously—

"Two millions!"

"Think what the church needs in these times of anarchy and godlessness. The great ones of the earth cannot be permitted to live in scandalous luxury while the defenders of the faith are hampered in all their activities for lack of necessary means. It is only right that they should sacrifice something of their overplus, if in this case it can be called sacrifice. For they have to thank us that through the discipline which we impose on men, they are able to enjoy their wealth. On the day on which the masses give themselves up entirely to atheism, the rich will see what they will have to suffer from the infamous greed of those who possess nothing."

"That's true," said the baroness, humbly.

"I explain these things to you as to a good Christian who understands and sympathizes with the situation of the

Church. There can be no discussion over the conditions. They are the result of a minute and careful adjustment with the circumstances. We know the value of the service we are rendering you, princess."

"Very well, vicar-general," replied the baroness; "may I ask you for a pen?"

"You need not sign the paper straight away. You can do so quietly at home, and then let us have it."

"But I should like you to fill in the blank space. You must understand, vicar-general, that I am curious to know the name——"

"I am sorry, princess, that I cannot satisfy your very natural curiosity now. Your son must sign the paper before we can write in the young lady's name."

"I must inform my son of my step? I would so much rather not do that."

"I respect your sensitiveness, princess," replied the vicar-general, smiling; "but you can scarcely marry the young man without his knowing it."

"Of course not, vicar-general," rejoined the baroness, quickly. "I only wished and hoped to have been able to introduce my son to the young lady without his knowing how the thing came about. When an impression has been produced on both sides, then he can be asked to sign the paper without hesitation."

"I am sorry, princess; but I am not permitted to act like that. The paper must be returned to me with both your signatures, then the space will be filled in, you will know the name, and receive the letters of introduction." He got up again, and bowed to the baroness.

She had no choice. She folded the paper, put it in her note-book with the gold and enamel cover, and took leave of the high dignitary.

On the way home she told Bertha, who had been waiting for her in the carriage, of the business in hand. Her mistress's frequent visits to the archiepiscopal palace had greatly excited the maid's curiosity, and she was irritated that the baroness did not make her the confidence to which she considered herself entitled. Now her suspense was pleasantly ended.

The baroness told her everything except the Jewish extraction of the heiress. That she kept to herself.

"We are lowering ourselves a little," she said; "but it serves the family right, why should they treat me so?" She grumbled at having to go to Trouville. That upset her usual habits. For years she had spent the bathing season at Étretat. She had been accustomed to go there with Prince Albrecht, she was known at the hotel, at the Casino, whereas at Trouville, she would be entirely unknown. But things could not be altered, and she was ready to make the sacrifice. She could not get the two millions out of her head. But Bertha, to whom she showed the paper, reassured her.

"It doesn't seem to be dangerous, your highness. It binds you to nothing, for if the marriage doesn't come off, you owe nothing, and if the prince marries the young lady your highness knows where to get the money."

"Yes, but I can't help feeling a little anxious. What I am to pay is clearly stated, but how much we're to get is not written down."

"If it were an ordinary agent, I should advise your highness not to sign. But since it is the cardinal himself who is arranging the matter, it is certain that it's all straightforward."

"I hope so, I'm sure. Now there is another difficulty. What will Siegfried say? You know what he's like."

"Yes, your highness, it's quite time to speak openly to the prince. For whom is your highness doing all this? For him. Now he has an opportunity of reaching his goal. If he doesn't take it, it proves that he would rather be Baron von Gronendal than Prince Loewenstein-Franka. Then your highness will have done more than your duty, and need not worry any more."

"I know that kind of answer," replied the baroness, angrily. "You're always ready with that advice: give it up. I've told you I would sooner die."

She did not tell Bertha why the thought of the unavoidable and decisive interview with Siegfried disquieted her. She hardly confessed it to herself. It was nothing

clear, but a gloomy uneasiness full of anxious forebodings and conjectures.

Some days back, Signora Conti's great concert had taken place; it formed a sort of annual examination for her pupils. The baroness had not accepted the invitation, because Nicoline was put down in the programme for three songs, and she did not wish either to see or hear her. It had stabbed her to the heart to read this morning in the *Vercingetorix* that Siegfried had been among the guests. The name of Frau Flammert, the "celebrated *prima donna* of the Diesa Court Theatre," also figured in the list. She had come to Paris in order to be present at her daughter's *début*. She did not doubt that Siegfried had gone out of love for Nicoline. That was suspicious. What were their relations to each other? Was there anything between them? Was he not free, as she had believed and hoped all the time that he must be, as the new turn of circumstances demanded? And Frau Flammert? Had she anything to do in the matter? Here was a dark place—a kind of weather-sign which threatened indistinctly but ominously.

In other ways, the *Vercingetorix* had not pleased her. Besides the report of the concert, it published a special article about Nicoline on the first page. It described the unexampled triumph of the young prodigy, and the enormous effect of her *début* on the delighted audience. All the nouns, adjectives, and adverbs that express admiration, were united in this inspired rhapsody, which glorified the appearance as well as the voice and style of the young artist. In conclusion, it stated, "What is here offered is more than promise. We never remember a *début* of similar brilliance. The Parisian and international connoisseurs who were assembled in Signora Conti's concert-room to-day, can boast that they assisted at the rising of the sun."

The baroness found this exaggeration repulsive and wanting in taste. She reckoned that the puff, with its beating of drums and blowing of trumpets, must have cost at least three thousand francs, and she wondered, not without a slight touch of envy, that Frau Flammert could

approve such a proceeding. Had Prince Johann become so generous in his old age? Extravagance was his last fault! But perhaps he thought to do his daughter a real benefit. It was very foolish, since such publicity could not be of any real use to her; but it was a kindly action on his part. He had more feeling for his own flesh and blood than certain other people.

The baroness was wrong. The article in the *Vercingetorix* was no paid advertisement, and no exaggeration. It was the actual impression of the audience and the pressmen who were there; they deemed that they had been witnesses of an event in dramatic history. Little Coppée who, despite a crust of indifference, was still capable of enthusiasm, had written thus enthusiastically from the direct impression made on him and on the delighted audience by Nicoline's artistic perfection.

"My dear fellow, a little more cautiously, more carefully, I beg," said the editor, when he read the effusion. And Coppée answered—

"Why? Let it go as it is. To-morrow, all Paris will be talking of this little Flammert, and the next day, the whole world, whether you like it or not. It is just a question whether the *Vercingetorix* will be beforehand or limp behind."

After the concert, Frau Flammert fell sobbing on Signora Conti's neck. The teacher was congratulated almost as enthusiastically as the pupil, who modestly tried to escape the praise by taking refuge in a side room. While Nicoline was singing, Siegfried felt the full charm of her beautiful figure, her expressive countenance, her shining eyes, and especially her magnificent bell-like voice; but he was terribly put out when the beautiful sounds ceased, and the wild applause broke out. He felt clearly how all this tumult overshadowed his presence, his words. Amid the picture of heated faces, open mouths, wildly-clapping hands, he vanished entirely. The surging audience came between him and Nicoline, and brutally tore him from her. For it was literally impossible for him to see her after the concert, and say a few courteous words. His giant stature and great physical strength was of no

avail, for he could not push through this select company like a luggage-porter. Unknown and unnoticed, a prince's privilege that the crowd should humbly give way before him, could not help him. He must wait patiently; and it was not until the crowd of elegant ladies, inconsiderate theatrical people, journalists keen to do their duty, had scattered, that he succeeded in reaching Nicoline. She gave him both her hands, and interrupted his low and stammered congratulations with the cordial, and it seemed to him somewhat condescending words—

"Thank you—thank you; I'm glad that you, too, are pleased. You are one of the three or four persons for whom I sang."

"Three or four," he thought, while he bowed. Then he saw Frau Flammert standing by her, and greeted her in surprise. She was one. Perhaps Signora Conti was another. Who was the fourth, if he was the third?

The fourth was a great *impresario*, who was eagerly talking to Frau Flammert, and had left off when Siegfried came up to her. But he only found that out later.

Frau Flammert was not pleased to see Siegfried; but her annoyance was diminished by Nicoline's unconcern. She asked coldly after his mother, and made no remark when he mentioned her sufferings. She then suddenly inquired as to his summer plans. He replied that he supposed he should go to Étretat as usual, and asked how long she intended to stay in Paris.

"Oh, I've only come to take Nicoline home. She must get out of this furnace as soon as possible, into our hills and forests, so as to recover from her labours. The poor child has had a year's very hard work."

Siegfried turned pale. "Are you leaving Paris so soon?" he asked, turning to Nicoline, who was receiving last compliments from some of the Signora's friends.

"Yes—what am I to do? Mamma wishes it; Signora Conti sends me away. On all sides I hear, 'Rest!' 'Recreation!' So I must have done with Paris." He thought she said it with remarkable lightness of heart.

"When do you think of starting?" he asked.

"That depends on mamma," replied Nicoline.

"I should like to go to-morrow," interposed Frau Flammert.

"That's impossible," said the *impresario*, quickly; "things can't be hurried up like that."

"We can't do it here, Herr Grün; come with us. What's a journey to Diesa to you?"

"Yes, yes; but before I consent to accompany you, I must at least be clear as to the preliminary conditions."

"Who is the man?" Siegfried asked Nicoline, in a whisper.

"Grün, the famous *impresario*, who is offering me work," she replied.

"Is that settled so quickly?"

"That's the rhythm of the age."

Some of the attendants came into the artists' room and claimed Signora Conti's attention, Grün talked eagerly to Frau Flammert, a group of Nicoline's fellow-pupils and of Signora Conti's friends prepared to take their departure, and attention was somewhat drawn away from Nicoline. Siegfried seized the moment to whisper quickly to her—

"I must see you before you go. How can we manage it?"

"Come and see me to-night after dinner," replied Nicoline.

His face grew dark. "Shall we be alone?"

"No."

"Why not, then, come rather to St. Augustin?" he asked.

"My mother won't stir from my side."

The whispered colloquy stopped because Frau Flammert turned to her daughter—

"Come, my child, we must go, or the attendants will turn us out."

Siegfried was forced to go, if he did not wish to seem an intruder.

When Nicoline gave him her hand, she said aloud, "*Au revoir* till this evening."

"Why?" asked Frau Flammert, discontentedly, as soon as Siegfried had disappeared.

"He wishes to make a formal call on you; surely that needs neither explanation nor excuse," rejoined Nicoline, simply.

"I would have let him off," returned her mother, threatening her gently with her forefinger.

They had got rid of Grün, the *impresario*, for a moment—he had invited himself to dine with them—and were alone in the carriage, and Frau Flammert put her arms round her daughter, and said—

"Haven't you put that nonsense out of your head?"

Nicoline nestled up against her mother, and replied, "But, mummy dear, why do you call it nonsense? We have been, and still are friends. Nothing has happened to spoil that relationship. Can you say that it has prevented me from working?"

"I don't say that."

"Now, why should the lonely young fellow be at fault because I have given him my friendship?"

"No, of course he isn't. But I'm glad you're going to get away from here."

About nine o'clock, the housemaid brought Siegfried to the little room in Nicoline's boarding-house, which served Frau Flammert as a reception-room. It was heavily scented with the perfume of flowers. Wreaths and bouquets were piled up on the scanty pieces of furniture, and among them a heap of letters and telegrams. Nicoline's triumph continued.

Grün, the *impresario*, sat at the table with Frau Flammert; papers lay spread out on it. He looked very excited and busy. An introduction could not be avoided.

"Herr Grün, the well-known *impresario*," said Frau Flammert, "his highness Prince Siegfried of Loewenstein-Franka"—Nicoline had asked her mother to give him the title.

Grün made a low bow, and remarked modestly, "'Well known'—you are too kind, madam. Scarcely yet. But I hope some slight reflection of this young lady's triumph may fall on me."

"This man would turn my head if it wasn't so strong," said Nicoline, smiling, while she asked Siegfried to sit down.

"No one will turn your head," rejoined Grün; "but you'll turn all their heads. Your highness, Mademoiselle Flammert is as good a man of business as she is a great artist."

"A man of business! I don't know you in that character, mademoiselle," said Siegfried,.

"Mr. Grün exaggerates," said Nicoline. "The tempter wants to buy my soul, and I have defended it, that's all."

"Splendid! One would think I had horns and horse's hoofs, and that this bond was signed in blood." He looked with delight at the paper before him, saw that the ink was dry, folded it up, and put it in a big morocco leather letter-case. "I hope we shall both be satisfied with one another. And not only for two years, you cruel little person," he added, turning to Nicoline as he got up. "You will let me help you at the station?" he said to Frau Flammert, who accompanied him to the door.

"Please don't trouble. We've hardly any luggage, and have only to get our tickets."

"I shall not be dissuaded. My service begins thus."

"There are things of which they have no idea at Diesa," said Frau Flammert, when she resumed her seat. "Just think, prince, Grün offered Nicoline an engagement for life."

"I am not surprised, madame," said Siegfried. "He runs no risk."

"You are right. One hundred thousand francs paid down at once; fifty thousand francs for the first year, every succeeding year fifty thousand francs more up to two-hundred and fifty thousand francs for a hundred appearances each year, and all travelling expenses paid for Nicoline and her suite."

"A mighty sum, indeed," murmured Siegfried.

"Stars danced before my eyes, and this rascal remained perfectly ice-cold, and calmly said 'No'!" Frau Flammert told him.

"Mummy is easily dazzled. I'm not. You threw yourself away, mummy, so I must take my revenge."

"No one ever made me such an offer."

"Because you buried yourself in Diesa. But a new period opens for you now. Only let me get to work."

"But you seem to have signed some contract," said Siegfried, gloomily.

"Oh, just a simple one that does not bind me to much. When I refused to bind myself for life, he climbed down —ten years, five years, and finally two years. To that I consented. So he will help me at the beginning of my career with his experience and business knowledge, and I'll take care he earns something."

"Do you really think he can make much out of it?" asked Frau Flammert, and turning to Siegfried, read out the contract lying before her, "thirty thousand francs premium—fifty thousand francs the first year—for twenty-four performances in London during the season, and free quarters in London for Nicoline and three persons. The next year, one hundred and twenty thousand francs for sixty performances, besides a six months' tour and hotel expenses—for two years the premium of a life insurance for three hundred thousand francs in my favour—that was my darling's idea." She kissed Nicoline, while her eyes grew dim with tears.

"I must at least repay what I have cost you," said Nicoline, responding to her mother's caress.

Siegfried felt very uncomfortable. As a lover of the drama, these details interested him, but it seemed to him that Nicoline was turning her back on him, leaving him standing on the steps, while she went into the house and shut the door in his face. He could not see where, in this new condition of affairs, there would be any place, even the smallest, for him.

"I hoped," he said, in order to say something, "that you would sing in Paris."

"Yes, she replied gaily, "Signora Conti wished so also, and took steps that the director of the opera should hear me. It was pathetic. But the director! It is easier to gain access to an emperor's palace than to your Opera House. There came printed answers, and then written answers, then conditional granting of an audience, as the high-flown document expressed it, then the fixing of a

distant appointment. Meanwhile, Grün stepped in and settled matters, and now I can snap my fingers at all this dull, conceited set."

She suited the action to the word.

"Nicoline," said her mother, reprovingly.

"I beg your pardon, mummy," said Nicoline, coaxingly. "I'm so glad I haven't got to go the rounds of all these directors. That's the pleasantest result of my contract with Grün."

"Sooner or later you'll sing at the Opera here. That's unavoidable in a great career."

"Certainly; but only when I'm so far up the ladder that they'll have to entreat me, not the other way about. London is no bad place for an artist's reputation."

"And are you going to rest till the London season?" asked Siegfried.

"Oh no! What are you thinking of? Mamma did not read out that item of the contract. I am obliged, until April 15th, to appear at least thirty times, and in six important parts, as I prefer, on either a German or Italian stage. That will give me sureness and practice so that I may be quite perfect in London."

"And have you chosen the theatre which you desire to honour?"

"Mamma wishes it to be Diesa."

"Ah!"

"That's the simplest thing to do," interrupted Frau Flammert, "there you'll be with me, and the public will spoil you——"

"I should be with you under any circumstances, for I should take you wherever I went. That goes without saying. And I care nothing about the public. It'll only be a trial trip. I should have preferred Milan or Bologna. Autumn and winter are pleasanter there. But no doubt things will go on all right at Diesa. It'll do for sowing one's wild oats."

"Don't be so proud, Nico. It's the setting in which the whole of my artist existence has been spent," said her mother.

Nicoline suddenly became serious, and her face was slowly suffused with a deep flush.

"That is exactly what makes me so contemptuous of Diesa. Setting, you call it. I call it a place of sacrifice."

"Let us drop the subject, my dear."

"Willingly, mother; it is finished."

Siegfried got up. He felt he should be wanting in tact if he stayed any longer. He would have gone before, only he was in such a wretched state of mind. His attention was so entirely taken up by a tumult of inward voices, and he seemed so distracted and absent-minded that he made the impression of an idiot on Frau Flammert. He felt that, and was irritated and depressed at the same time. Could she think kindly of him? What *rôle* was he playing there? What did she know? How much had Nicoline confided to her? Two or three times a terrible impulse had come on him to jump up, catch hold of Nicoline's hand, and to exclaim passionately, "But, Nicoline, don't think only of yourself and your contract; introduce me to your mother as your *fiancé*." But convention was too strong. He dared not. Nicoline did not encourage him with word or look. She was as indifferent to him as to a stranger. And he was not really her *fiancé*.

He must have things clear between them, and she must speak to him before they parted. Therefore he must see her alone. How? Where? When?

She knew perfectly what was passing in him. For when he went, she accompanied him into the hall.

"Nicoline, I must see you again," he whispered, passionately, pressing her hand.

"Come to-morrow morning," she replied, and withdrew her hand quickly from his.

"Where?"

"Here, of course."

"Don't torment me, we must be alone."

"We shall be alone. About eleven o'clock."

Her mother thought the leave-taking lasted too long, and came out of the little drawing-room, the door of which had remained open, into the hall.

"I should like to say good-bye to Nero, too. Bring him with you, will you?" said Nicoline, aloud.

Siegfried made a low bow and went.

The tall, handsome young man, and his beautiful dog, excited observation in the streets through which he walked the next morning in order to reach Nicoline's house.

He had not long to wait for Nicoline after the maid showed him and his dog into the drawing-room. She was dressed in light blue, trimmed with cream-coloured lace, and looked pale and tired. In spite of her strong nerves she had had to pay for the excitement of the day before, in broken sleep and feverish dreams.

She allowed Siegfried to kiss the hand she gave him, and began to stroke Nero, whom she had greeted with a loud cry. The dog did not recognize her at once, and growled under her touch.

"But, Nero!" exclaimed Nicoline, while Siegfried bade him "be quiet."

"So soon are we forgotten by our best friends," said Nicoline.

Her voice evidently helped Nero's memory, and he gradually recalled her. It could be perceived how her form became clearer to his dog's consciousness. He began to wag his tail, at first hesitatingly, uncertainly, gently, then more decisively and quickly, and at last he gave a low bark, and licked her hand joyfully with his big red tongue.

"My mother has gone shopping, and I managed to persuade her to do without my company. I told no lie when I said I was too tired."

She had sat down on the sofa, Siegfried took a chair beside it, and warded off the dog's expressions of friendship, which were becoming warmer and warmer.

"You're not ill?"

There was a note of anxiety in Siegfried's voice.

"Oh no. Only a little over-done. It was rather too much yesterday."

There was a short pause, during which Siegfried looked at her, and tried to read the expression in her blue eyes.

"Thank you for giving me this opportunity," he stammered out in a low tone. "It is humiliating for us to be condemned to have secrets from your mother."

"Not at all," said Nicoline, quickly. "She knows that you are here."

"And how did you explain——"

"A whim. I wanted to see Nero before my departure——"

"And doesn't she know anything about me, about our —about our friendship?"

"Yes. She knows that we are friends. She sees that we are. It's quite natural when we lived for three months under the same roof, and dined at the same table."

"You've not told her anything else?"

"What else?"

"Nicoline, have you forgotten our discussion? Are we nothing to each other?"

"I have forgotten nothing, and nothing has changed between you and me. We are to each other what we were?"

"I haven't got that feeling. Until yesterday we have only seen each other five times in six weeks. And you were always so full of your work and plans that you hadn't a single cordial word for me."

"Circumstances have brought that about."

"And now you are leaving Paris, and God knows how long the separation will be, and I must bid you farewell at the station like a stranger, with a bouquet, and a formal bow, and shall probably be thrust aside by an *impresario* and other important people."

"Those are mere outward circumstances. We must bravely endure them," said Nicoline.

"That's all very fine. But what is behind these outward circumstances? What am I to you?"

Nicoline let go her hold of the dog, and sat up straight.

"Siegfried," she said, in a calm, determined voice, "you know I hate roundabout ways. What I think, I like to say out. What do you wish? To marry me?"

"Yes."

"Now, at once?"

"Now, at once—that isn't possible."

"Why not?"

"Nicoline, you are cruel."

"No, only sensible. I repeat, why not?"

"But, Nicoline," he said, stuttering and casting down his eyes, "how can I think of marrying now? I don't know what I have to offer you—I possess nothing—I've no position——"

"Very well. But it's clear that I shall earn enough for the two of us——"

"Nicoline!" He got up so hastily that Nero also, who had laid himself down, sprang to his feet.

"I know, I know. You need not get excited. You don't wish to be merely the husband of your wife."

"You should not express it like that," objected Seigfried.

"I should not be able to respect you, and I must respect the man to whom I give myself. What other feeling should I have for him? Pity? I can't feel as a mother to you. You're too big and strong."

"Where does love come in, Nicoline?"

"That's taken for granted. That's the hypothesis. If it wasn't, you may be sure I have character enough to say, let us each go our own way."

He was silent for a while, and painful thoughts went through his mind. At length, looking up straight at Nicoline, he said—

"How do we stand to each other? Are we bound? Do you want to be free?"

Nicoline returned his look, and said in a firm voice, "You are bound if you feel yourself bound, and free if you feel yourself free, only in that case you must tell me so. I am not proud. I am content to let my conduct depend on yours. So long as you don't give me my dismissal, I shall keep my word."

He grasped her hand and kissed it, and then growing bolder, made a slight effort to draw her towards him. She gently resisted. He grew red and white by turns. She was like a mere straw in a storm before his strength—

why did he not press her to his breast and devour her with kisses as he ardently desired to do, and take no heed of her resistance.

Nicoline felt the stirrings of passion within him, and drew back. He pulled himself together and regained his self-control.

"That seems clear, and is yet ambiguous. I shall never change. But when may I come to you? Only when I have an assured position?"

"I care nothing about that," she replied hastily. "I hope you don't misunderstand me. I have said it so often. I should be glad if you could make good your claims. Not because I want to be a princess, but because you would have overcome powerful adversaries in a splendid fight. If victory is not possible, that will not trouble me, only the thing must be ended once and for always and must not any longer influence our lives. You must find some other way of employing your energies that shall be worthy of you, and content you."

He smiled bitterly, "Meanwhile you, quite undisturbedly, will devote yourself to your career."

"Of course I shall. Do I deny it?"

"Am I presuming too much if I ask if we are to write to each other?"

"Why so ironical, Siegfried? You must always tell me everything that passes in you and around you, and I promise you to do the same."

"May I sometimes go and see you?"

"You will always and everywhere be welcome."

He got up. "You're really going to-morrow?"

"At 8.25, from the Gare de l'Est."

"I don't know whether you would like me to come to the station."

"Perhaps it is better not. It would leave a bitter after-taste."

He suddenly drew her towards him, and before she could prevent him, kissed her passionately on the mouth, and when she gave a low cry, and resisted with both arms against his breast, he said, in a hoarse, imploring voice—

"Nicoline, for the sake of the sweet after-taste."

She freed herself without opposition on his part, nodded, waved a quick, gentle farewell with her hand and slipped from the room. Siegfried stared at the door through which she had vanished for a while, called Nero, and left the house which henceforth would have no interest for him.

As he walked home, he was filled with strong feelings of displeasure. He was beset by an immense desire for the girl which must now be unsatisfied. He was ashamed as is a tiger who jumps just short of his prey and sees it escape. He was vexed with his weakness of spirit. Why had he always treated her like the princess for whom she took herself. Why had not he taken her, as behoved superior man? It is true that she shot a man if he annoyed her, but surely she would not act so towards all. Who was she that she should impose conditions with such condescension? A disowned child of sin. Talented, certainly. But if she lost her voice to-morrow, a mere nobody, and that kind of thing happened. He was really doing her great honour to ask for her hand. But she resisted. Did she really love him? Sometimes he had thought so. But all that she had said to him to-day was so cold and reasonable.

How soberly she had preached to him, "A man is himself! Be the architect of your own fortune." Just like that eccentric Heeremann. Brave men think of such things. What could he do if his birthright was withheld. Go on the Stock Exchange and become a millionaire. Heeremann should have tried that first. He could take up his studies again, complete them and enter official life. Then there would be the hope, if things prospered, of being, in ten years' time, president of a Government Board —a goal worth the labour involved! Perhaps it would be possible for him to become an officer. But he was five years behind his comrades, unless the authorities were gracious enough to antedate his commission—and possibly he might attain the rank of major, an entrancing dream.

A great destiny! That was perhaps possible in America, he couldn't say, but in old, worn-out Europe, no. There life goes on its way in well-defined ruts, and it's

useless to try to go across country, everything is built in by walls and palings. Napoleon would have been all his life an obscure little artillery officer; Bismarck a capricious dike-director and village grandee; Gambetta would have remained a briefless barrister if a wave of revolution had not carried them on its crest to giddy heights. Architect of one's own fortune! One's legendary ancestors could become head of the army in a time when battles were won by sheer physical strength. Who knows how far the founders of the house of Meissen might have come in the time of the magazine-rifle! But to rise to high places through your own strength—that was a wild, fantastic dream. He who was not originally a ruler of society, could not carve himself a path to such glory through its strata; those strata can only be upset through some powerful commotion which, like an earthquake, brings down everything in ruins. Was he to wait for a catastrophe in order to claim Nicoline?

While such thoughts were passing through his mind, his mother had been having her interview with the vicar-general. They both sat at lunch, sunk in their own thoughts, and did not talk. When it was over and Siegfried was about to go to his own room, the baroness said—

"Siegfried, come up with me, I want to speak to you."

He was alarmed. Did she know where he had been yesterday and this morning? Would she read him another lecture? In his present mood that was most distasteful.

Although she mounted the stairs very slowly and rested several times, it was some while after she reached her boudoir before she could get her breath. When at last she was able to speak, she turned to her son, who stood before her with a hostile and reserved manner.

"You guessed, perhaps, why I went with you to his Eminence?"

"You told me, mamma. In order to gain an entry into aristocratic Catholic society."

"Yes; but not only that. It is time that we looked at things seriously. I've only a few thousand francs left. When they are gone we have three courses: to go to

the family, hanging our heads like whipped dogs; to open a milliner's shop; or to die of starvation."

Siegfried frowned. His lips trembled. "You don't think the cardinal will help us?"

"No. But he will marry you."

"Oh, indeed!"

A deep red slowly overspread his face, and he cast down his eyes in order to avoid his mother's glance.

"He has a young lady in view for you, with a dowry of fifty millions and prospects. She is not of specially distinguished origin, but you are sufficiently so for two, and she has everything else that can make a man happy."

He listened in silence, staring in front of him.

"We can live here in accordance with our rank with two millions income. No one opposes our title in France. Then we needn't trouble ourselves any more about the grand-duke and the duke. And when we don't want anything of them they will make advances to us. If they make too much fuss when the marriage of his highness Prince Siegfried of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level is announced, you can challenge one of them, even if it's an uncle. If he refuses, well, he won't have public opinion with him. If he accepts, you need not kill him, you can content yourself with wounding him. Your hand is sure enough. It will be a warning to the others." She stopped; but when Siegfried made no reply, she asked, "Now, what do you think of it?"

"To sell one's self—that's what it is," he murmured gloomily.

"What an idea!" she exclaimed. "Why, I shan't even tell you beforehand the lady's name. You will meet her in society, together with other young ladies, and you won't know which she is. You may have a notion. So you will get to know her quite easily, and only when I find that you like each other shall we formally demand her hand in marriage. That is a concession to your sentimentality. But it is quite superfluous. The founding of a new branch of your dynasty on a base of fifty millions is an important historical event, which will have its effect on future centuries. Sentiment has no part to play in it.

For the sake of the great end, you must put aside personal inclination. But I am sure it will be in accord with your inclination. Why not? A beautiful, young, clever girl —it would be against nature if she did not strongly attract you."

At that moment he felt sincere, almost sympathetic admiration for his mother. What a wide view! What elevated thought! A veritable ancestress! He compared her with his deceased father. The real royal nature was undoubtedly on her side. But Nicoline? Well, he would be committing no impropriety towards her. "You are bound if you feel yourself bound, free if you feel yourself free." He heard the tone in which Nicoline had said those words, and it had sounded to him icy. He might as well see the girl. If she made no impression on him, then he would have done Nicoline no injury. If she took Nicoline's place in his heart, Nicoline could not complain so long as he loyally told her of the change. He would not omit to do that.

"And what do you expect of me?" asked Siegfried.

The baroness had watched him with concealed anxiety all the while he had been silently thinking. She heaved a deep sigh of relief, answered gently, almost caressingly—

"Only that you shall make yourself pleasant when you are introduced to the young lady at Trouville—we are going to Trouville. It should not be difficult for you to turn a little girl's head."

"To Trouville, then?"

"Yes; and there's just one thing more—a mere formality. You must sign this with me."

She took the vicar-general's document out of her notebook, signed her name slowly and deliberately, and handed it to Siegfried.

He took the paper, read it, and exclaimed softly, "Two millions!"

"That need not frighten us," she observed quickly. "If you marry her, why, you've got it. If nothing comes of it, we are not liable."

"The cardinal doesn't work for nothing."

"Siegfried, that's not nice of you. Remember the

churches and monasteries and abbeys that your ancestors founded in Loewenstein and Franka and Diesa and Kupferberg. Unfortunately they're not Catholic any longer. It's only seemly that Duke Siegfried shall inaugurate the foundation of his new house with a similar presentation."

"The name is not filled in?"

"For the reason I told you. You are to know nothing, so that you may not be handicapped in any way."

He hesitated an instant, then signed in a firm hand. The baroness folded the paper, and said with emotion—

"Thank you, Siegfried, you are doing it of course for yourself, but you are acting as a dutiful son, and that will bring you happiness. I hope that we have come to an end of our trials. Now leave me. I am tired."

When Siegfried had gone, she rang for Bertha, and said gaily to her as she entered the room—

"I've spoken to Siegfried. He agrees!"

"Then everything's all right, your highness," replied Bertha, and kissed her mistress's hand.

Preparations for the journey to the seaside were begun at once. The French translation of Osterburg's memorial which Siegfried quickly finished was sent to the printer with the German original, and the order that pamphlets should be sent to Osterburg directly they were ready. On the following Monday the baroness again went to the vicar-general's and he again received her before his other visitors; she gave him the signed document. He examined the papers, then filled in the blank space with his fine, stiff handwriting, and returned the paper to the baroness. She read half-aloud, with wrinkled brow, "Marie-Jeanne Bloch," and without remark handed him the paper back.

"If you will allow me, princess, I'll give you the letters of introduction now," said the vicar-general. "It won't take long."

It did not take long, for the letters to the priest and to the Dowager Countess de Rochenoire were both ready, and the vicar-general had only to sign them and address the envelopes.

"The Countess de Rochenoire," he explained, as he gave her the letters, "plays a leading part among the Norman

landed nobility. The whole valley of Touques belonged to her family before the Revolution. She is an old lady. It won't do any harm, princess, if you call on her first. I merely mention this to avoid misunderstandings."

The baroness thanked him, and took her departure. As the vicar-general accompanied her to the door, he said—

"Let us pray that the Lord will bless the beginnings of our enterprise. I shall be informed of its progress; but I beg of you to write to me yourself, all the same."

In the letter to the lady at Trouville which she hastened to read as soon as she was in the carriage, she was described as "Her highness the widowed princess of Loewenstein-Franka, Baroness von Gronendal," while in that to the priest she was described only as Princess Loewenstein-Franka.

The baroness, with Siegfried, Bertha, Janusz, and Bella —Frau Büchler, the cook, the coachman, and Nero were left at home—took up their quarters at Trouville in the Hotel des Roches Noires where she paid a hundred francs a day. She saw that it would run away with the rest of her property, but what of that? She began her existence on the scale of two millions a year. She presented the letter of introduction to the priest in person, that to the Countess de Rochenoire she sent by Janusz, with a note asking when she might most conveniently be received. The priest paid her attention beseeming her royal rank, and on her first visit complained that the resident community was small and indifferent, that for the most part the brilliant and numerous summer guests consisted of irreligious worldlings, but that side by side with their luxury was much wretchedness, and that the means at the priest's disposal for helping the needy was very small. The baroness could not do less than celebrate her entry into the priest's house by a considerable offering for his pious work of alleviating misery.

Madame de Rochenoire wrote pleasantly that she had heard of her coming to Trouville through mutual Paris friends, and that she would be very glad to make her personal acquaintance if she would do her the honour of coming to see her on her 'At home' day.

The countess lived in a fine house, with courtyard and garden which seemed to be badly kept. The statues which filled the niches in the seventeenth-century style lacked heads and arms, the wide steps leading to the entrance were worn down, crooked, and partly broken, and several railings were wanting to the balustrade. The interior likewise showed a character of inherited solidity which had not been kept up and renewed. The household arrangements made no impression of luxury. The gate on the street was only latched. No servants appeared, either in the hall or on the staircase, except an elderly man, looking like a peasant, who opened the door to the baroness. The mistress of the house was a little old lady in widow's weeds, softened by white frills, with white hair, and a little grey moustache. She was dignified, reserved, and somewhat ceremonious, but the pure Norman dialect which she spoke like any dairywoman of the district, contrasted with her patrician manner. The baroness might have smiled at this, but her gaiety vanished during her conversation with the old lady.

After the exchange of a few ceremonious remarks, the countess said she should be very glad to arrange for the prince to meet the Blochs. She did not doubt that the match would come off, for the Blochs were eagerly looking out for a great alliance. She congratulated the princess in advance, for the girl was charming and her fortune large. She would do everything in her power to assist the enterprise, for she must not conceal from her that she had a very serious interest in it. On a wondering look from the baroness, she continued with the greatest brutality—

"Yes, princess, the land brings in scarcely anything. We live in the country, in order to economize; but here we must respect our rank, and during the season, social duties are the same as in Paris. I am at the cardinal's service, and am glad to be of use to his friends, but I expect some acknowledgment."

"We shall not fail in that point," said the baroness, with annoyance.

"I should like to know exactly on what I can count," continued the old lady, pitilessly.

The baroness was much embarrassed. "Trust to our right feeling."

The countess was not to be put off. "Let us state a sum. That will simplify the matter for both of us."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me how much you expect?"

"I don't think a hundred thousand francs too much, when it's a question of ninety or a hundred millions."

The baroness protested strongly. There were not nearly so many millions.

"With expectations," put in the old lady.

"Then the cardinal has made the price too high. There can be no question of one hundred thousand francs."

A regular haggling followed between the two women, in which the baroness was almost a match for the little Norman. She gave her to understand that she considered she made a great sacrifice in receiving people like the Blochs, notwithstanding their great wealth and their close relations with the Church, and it did not make the least impression on her that the baroness, on her part, alluded to the distinction conferred by her and her son on every house they entered. Finally, they agreed on fifty thousand francs. But when the Countess de Rochenoire asked for an immediate payment of five, or two, or, at least, one thousand francs, she found the baroness adamant. What made her so was the fact that she had not got the money. The old lady had to be content with a promise that should be redeemed after the wedding.

The baroness and her son were much observed in Trouville. The local journal announced their arrival in a courteous paragraph. The manager of the Casino hastened to call on them in person, and to place admission tickets at their disposal. Some Russians, English, and Spaniards were introduced to them at the hotel. Siegfried was invited to lawn-tennis parties and chosen to compete in the pigeon-shooting matches, where his skill excited remark. The women admired his appearance when they saw him on the beach, and they openly ogled him. He met numberless young ladies, some of whom he found attractive. But he

felt a certain constraint in his intercourse with them, since he asked himself anxiously at each new introduction, "Is it she?"

The baroness made it her business to get a sight of the girl whom she already regarded as her future daughter-in-law. But during the first week she did not succeed, either on the beach, in the theatre or casino, at the races or the pigeon-shooting matches. None of the three or four hotel acquaintances who pointed out the distinguished persons in the place, mentioned the name of Bloch. She was, however, to see the whole family first in quite another place—at high mass, the second Sunday of her stay. In the front row, a few places from her and Siegfried, a strikingly Jewish-looking man, a dark-haired girl, the very image of him, and an elderly lady sat on red velvet chairs. It rushed through her head, "It's they." Her heart stood still, and then began to beat again, painfully, quickly, and irregularly. She observed them carefully throughout the service. The man distinguished himself by his devotion. He knelt from beginning to end of the office. The girl looked gentle, pretty, and lively. She had no clear impression of the mother, who looked well-fed and heavy, except, perhaps, that of commonplaceness. She impatiently awaited the conclusion of the service, and then went in all haste to the sacristy, bidding Siegfried wait for her at the door, asked the priest who her neighbours were, and received confirmation of her guess.

Those were they, then! She was not greatly impressed, but it would do. The parents were not exactly charming, but that could not be altered. Possibly the girl's face only looked so unmistakably Jewish when seen beside her father's. Alone, she might be taken for Southern, Provençal, or Spanish. On the whole, the baroness was not displeased, and full of hope, she looked forward to the formal introduction, which would doubtless take place at the dinner and *soirée* at the Countess Rochenoire's, to which they had received an invitation for next Saturday.

The evening arrived. The dinner guests numbered twelve, inclusive of the lady of the house, the niece who lived with her, and the priest. The baroness saw at the

first glance that the Blochs were not there. Were they waiting for them? No. Dinner was announced. Perhaps they were only invited to the *soirée*. That was a want of tact on the part of the countess! Guests kept arriving from half-past nine, families from the neighbourhood with high-sounding titles, a few Parisians, two or three foreign visitors to Trouville, and besides ladies and gentlemen of various ages, only two girls, one a very pretty blonde from Paris, who roused Siegfried's interest, but he did not like to pay her marked attention for fear of annoying the other who was less pretty. He did not know which was the right one. There were about thirty people present.

The baroness had been silent and absent-minded during dinner. In the drawing-room she carefully observed the arrivals. About eleven, when for over half an hour no one more had come, she could no longer restrain herself. Somewhat suddenly leaving her neighbour, the owner of an estate in the district, with whom she had been carrying on a tedious, indifferent conversation, she took the mistress of the house aside and whispered—

"The Blochs are not here?"

"No, princess," replied the little old lady, and tried to make her escape.

"I thought you had invited them?" continued the baroness, placing herself in front of the countess so that she could not get away.

"I did, of course; but they sent an excuse."

And she had not been told! What did it mean? "Monsieur and Madame Bloch knew that they would meet us here?"

"Certainly, princess. Excuse me——" And she succeeded in escaping, and took refuge in a group of her guests.

The baroness looked for Siegfried, beckoned to him, and after a cool leave-taking of her hostess, left the house.

When, by noon the next day, she had received no sort of explanation, the baroness resolved to pay her complimentary visit at once, and without Siegfried.

"I was greatly disappointed not to meet the Blochs

here yesterday," said the baroness, almost rushing into the house.

"So was I, princess," replied the countess, with enigmatic curtness.

"What excuse did they give?"

"Really, none. A few hours before the dinner Madame Bloch wrote to me that she was very sorry not to be able to come, but they had decided to leave Trouville earlier than usual, in order to go to their estates. Full stop. That was all."

"Ah!" was all the baroness said.

The little old lady merely shrugged her shoulders.

The baroness thanked her for her hospitality, and found it unnecessary to prolong the conversation. The Blochs' departure made Madame de Rochenoire useless to her. She sent her in the evening a splendid bouquet, with a note in which she told her that, in consequence of her bad health, she was not able to receive guests at Trouville. She hoped to have the pleasure of seeing her when she came to Paris.

She wrote to the vicar-general at once, told him of the incident, and asked what she was to understand by the sudden departure; whether it meant a desire to avoid the introduction to her?

The high dignitary's reply did not reach her till four days later, during which the baroness did not go out, and indeed only got up for a few hours each day. He wrote in terms of the greatest politeness, yet with no beating about the bush, that Monsieur Bloch had informed him, not without reproach, that he had made inquiries as to Siegfried's position, and had learnt that the Prince of Loewenstein and Franka had no right to that title and rank. He was surprised that any one could imagine he should allow his only daughter to enter into an alliance under such shady circumstances, or to be reproached that she should claim a title which had no rightful existence. The vicar-general added that, for his part, he was very sorry that Monsieur Bloch was so particular. On the other hand, she might learn a lesson from the failure of the plan: it might be easier to marry the Baron von

Gronendal than the impugned Prince of Loewenstein-Franka, only in that case the demands must be considerably lowered.

The baroness was in bed when Bertha brought her the letter. After a few moments she let it fall from her hand, perhaps without having read it through, groaned slightly, then became suddenly quiet, and her head rolled to one side of the heaped-up pillows.

Bertha taking it for one of the usual fainting fits to which she was accustomed, hastened to her mistress's assistance, and administered the ether remedies always ready in case of need. When Bertha found that the liquid was not swallowed but ran out of the mouth over the cheek on to the pillow, she was much terrified, and, with a shaking hand made an injection of ether as she had been obliged to do on two or three former occasions. But when that failed to bring the baroness to, a great terror fell on Bertha, and she summoned help. Janusz and the hotel servants came running up, a doctor was sent for, and also Siegfried who would probably be found at the Casino or on the beach, and Bertha begged Janusz not to leave her alone with the baroness.

The doctor came before Siegfried arrived, and stated that the baroness was dead. For the last ten minutes Bertha and Janusz had no longer doubted it. At length Siegfried tore open the door and came hastily in. The hotel servant had told him of his mother's sudden illness, and the porter, instructed by the doctor, had informed him of her death. In reply to his questions, Bertha told him in short broken sentences, sobbing the while, all she could of her mistress's sudden death, and gave him the letter she had been reading which lay open on the coverlet. Siegfried motioned that he would be alone with his mother. When Bertha and Janusz had gone, he knelt down by the bedside and kissed her nerveless hand. He did not feel an impulse to kiss her face. That had not been a childish custom with him. He had never done it. And as there were no witnesses, there was no need to force himself to anything that did not come naturally. No tears moistened his eyes. He was of a hard, or, perhaps, rather of a hardened nature.

But a number of vague thoughts rushed through his disturbed and confused brain. His mother had not loved him greatly. He was wholly convinced of that. But, all the same, her death was a heavy blow to him. She had thought and acted for him. She had taken all responsibility from him. He had played, on principle, the comfortable part of a strong opposition. Now he had to play that of government. He could no longer criticise and grumble, but must himself act. She had been the clucking hen who had protected him with her wings. He first became conscious of the warmth and comfort of that shelter, when it suddenly failed him, and he felt the cold till he shivered. What was to be done now? He was so terribly alone in the world. He had no family, for his own flesh and blood denied him. He did not perceive that at this hour his mother's relatives did not even come into his mind. He had no connection with anybody or anything. He felt no support, no firm ground under his feet. It seemed to him he was orphaned like no other orphan in the world.

Only after giving rein for a while to his gloomy thoughts did he at length pull himself together and rise from his knees. His eyes fell on the letter he still held in his hand. He read it quickly, with clenched teeth. So the young lady to whom he was to have sold himself was called Bloch! That was why the name had been concealed from him. And he was not even good enough for this Bloch. The letter, as in a flash of lightning, lit up the precipice beneath his feet. Bloch wouldn't have anything to do with him. He must make more modest demands, more modest than putting up with Bloch!

"Father, mother, how have you sinned against me!" That was the thesis of his reflections in his hour of grief.

Material concerns now claimed his time and thoughts, and for many days he had no leisure for introspection. He did not find money enough to settle the Trouville bills. Happily every one allowed him credit, and with regard to the extortionate demands of the hotel, who charged for new furniture for the death-chamber, of the doctor who put each visit at a hundred francs, of the firm

of undertakers to whom was entrusted the coffining of the body and its transport to Paris, he was not sorry that he could not pay them immediately.

He telegraphed to all the members of the Meissen family, and to all his mother's noble relatives that she had died suddenly of heart disease, and signed himself "Siegfried of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level." He did not receive a single reply, but after a while learnt that three recipients of the telegram had refused to take it in.

The funeral took place in Paris. Besides Siegfried and the servants scarcely a dozen persons followed the hearse, decorated with coronets and armorial bearings. There was of course hardly any one in town in the latter part of August. Siegfried remembered the military and official display, and the crowd attracted by it, on the occasion of his father's funeral, and the feeling of his neglected and outcast condition came over him with such force that it brought to his eyes the tears that the sight of his mother's coffin had failed to evoke.

The press did not treat her kindly. The Paris papers announced her death in a brief paragraph in society news. The Franka official organ said nothing. In a couple of German papers, contributors remembered the woman who had been kind to them at Castle Lindenheim or the Villa Josephine, and dedicated obituary notices to her in which she was celebrated as the former prodigy and artist. Little Coppée wrote a long notice of her in the *Vercingetorix* which put her on a pedestal, and he took the opportunity of referring in flattering terms to the "young prince, the inheritor of the illustrious blood of his father, and of the talents of his gifted mother, before whom lay a delightful future whether he entered public life, or restricted himself to playing a leading part in society." Siegfried wrote him a polite letter of thanks, upon which Coppée paid him a visit. He alluded to the misunderstanding that had lately produced a coolness between himself and the baroness, but added that at heart he had never failed in his devotion to her, and would be glad to be of use to Siegfried in any way possible. And the kindly speech did not deteriorate into

an open or implied demand for a loan. It was the only case of the kind. Saint-Denis, the actor, when he paid his visit of condolence, merely asked whether steps had been taken by the deceased lady for obtaining his decoration, or whether Siegfried could do it. Siegfried had to say no to both propositions, upon which the artist swiftly took his leave, and Siegfried never saw him again. Count Laporte seemed much disappointed that his dear friend and patroness had not left him even a souvenir, and pathetically described how very much he had been counting on her kindness for the future. Siegfried made short work with the parasite. He assured him that he would never get another penny, and that for the future his visits to the Villa Josephine might be dispensed with without regret.

"Blood is everything," the old aristocrat somewhat enigmatically observed, as he withdrew in a dignified manner. The Dormans proved themselves friends indeed. Taking it for granted that they could not leave Siegfried alone in his grief, they came to every meal at the Villa, and it was only with great difficulty that he prevented them sleeping there, for there was room now, and they were ready to do everything for him for a not inconsiderable commission.

The condolence letters he received were very cool. Madame Abeille contented herself with a brief conventional note. Others merely sent a visiting card. He received an electric shock, when, from some Thuringian summer resort, he got a letter from Nicoline, to whom he had not announced his mother's death. She wrote—

"Dear Siegfried,

"I have just seen in the newspaper that your poor mother is dead. I can scarcely believe it, for surely you would have sent me word. Couldn't you find a minute amid your grief and the endless little importunate worries you must have had at such a time, you poor fellow? In that case I am doubly sorry that I could not be with you. You should have asked me to come. I could have

come without neglecting my duty, for my work does not begin until the middle of September. Tell me all about everything. With heartfelt sympathy,

"I am, your true

"NICOLINE."

Siegfried made the miserable excuse that he did not know where to write to her, and gave her some details about the death. He naturally did not say what had taken his mother and himself to Trouville, but he had the vicar-general's letter in his mind all the time he was writing to her, because, although she was not formally his *fiancée*, he regarded her as belonging to him.

His maternal uncle had also learnt the death of his sister and benefactress from the newspapers. He wrote to his nephew in a respectful fashion, and on a sheet of official paper, in order to offer his condolence, to point out his very narrow means as a poorly paid father of many children, and to say, humbly, that he hoped his never-to-be-forgotten sister had arranged to remain his guardian angel even beyond the grave.

That side of the family asked something of him, while the other denied him! He found the letter, which was scarcely humorous, a droll satire on his situation, and left it unanswered.

Such discourteous conduct was to be in some measure excused by his pecuniary affairs, which were certainly hopeless. Siegfried studied them with his lawyer. There was nothing left but bills and pawn-tickets. The Villa Josephine, was deeply mortgaged. When the death duties were paid, it was doubtful if anything would remain behind the mortgage. On the debit side there was only some jewellery and the furniture of the Villa Josephine and Castle Lindenheim.

In order to clear the air a little, Siegfried sold the jewellery—the unpledged as well as the pledged. Entirely ignorant in such matters, he was obliged to accept the eagerly proffered services of the Dormans, who took care that the results of the business should bring him very little.

Bertha was enraged at Siegfried's procedure. She had reckoned on at least a portion of the jewellery, as a reward for faithful service, and considered herself a victim of the blackest ingratitude. The nice little property that she had acquired at the baroness's side in the course of years, did not lessen her irritation. That was a different thing. A few day's after her mistress's burial, she told Siegfried she wished to leave and return to her home, and Siegfried let her go without a sentimental farewell.

He used the opportunity to break up the household. The old coachman, Janusz, and the cook were dismissed, the state carriage and the fat cobs were sold for a mere song, Nero was given to the Polish servant, who immediately disposed of the splendid creature for a hundred marks.

He was undecided what to do about Frau Büchler. The family had settled an annuity on her when she entered Prince Albrecht's service, and she could spend it where she pleased. He asked her whether she wished to go or to stay with him. The elderly dame had a sharp struggle with herself. Although, since he had been grown up, he had done nothing to keep her love, she was attached to the young man to whom she had supplied a mother's place from infancy. Undoubtedly she would live more peacefully, if she went back to her home. But she found it hard to leave Siegfried, who had been the object of her life for twenty-three years, and who, she felt, was lonely, and surrounded by unscrupulous parasites, and less able than ever to do without her. So her answer was decisive.

"Your highness, if you'll keep me, I'll stop."

Even his reserve melted before the cordiality of her look and tone. He pointed out to her that life with him would not be attractive, it might even entail a good deal of self-denial. She shook her head, and said—

"I've spent pleasant days with you; I can take the less pleasant in with them. My annuity will keep me from want."

He gave her his hand, which she covered with tears and kisses, and said—

"Very well, then, if you really wish it. I have to take a long journey for the settlement of my affairs. I

shall be obliged to sell the house. Meanwhile you will remain here and keep it in order, if you are not afraid of staying in it alone."

"How long will your highness be away?"

"I don't know; in any case, some weeks."

Frau Büchler considered a little, and then declared that she would prefer to go to acquaintances at Franka during his absence.

"To Franka? That fits very well. That's where I'm going first," said Siegfried.

The Dormans begged to be allowed to take the Villa Josephine under their protection, but in vain, and they were unpleasantly surprised when they found that it was dismantled, the furniture warehoused, and the house placed at the lawyer's disposal for sale. Accompanied to the station by the grieving Dormans, Siegfried and Frau Büchler took the train one September evening for Franka.

Siegfried's feelings were of a painful nature, when he came out of the station at Franka, and drove in an ordinary fly to the outlying portion of the town where Castle Lindenheim was situated. He rang, and the surprised custodian admitted him into the fine old building which had been the scene of his joyless childhood. The rooms were clean and in good order, the fine park well kept, resplendent now in its autumn glory. The china animals, the prince's ridiculous hobby, lay on the turf by all the paths in their grotesque, yet not wholly unnatural attitudes. The three fountains, and the little waterfall by the shell grotto, splashed and sparkled. Tears rose to Frau Büchler's eyes as her glance strayed over all the beauty. Siegfried remembered how oppressed and confined he had always felt there.

The custodian, a servant of the grand ducal household, apologized that the beds were not made, the drawing-room furniture uncovered, or the carpets laid down. If the baron had only announced his coming, so that he might have had a few hours for preparation!

Siegfried, offended by the term "baron," which the man dragged in as often as possible, ordered him to prepare rooms for himself and Frau Büchler, and said that

she would help. He, meanwhile, would go into the park.

There the man soon followed him. "I beg your pardon, baron, what about the flag?" The expression of his face showed how deeply the matter worried him.

"What flag?" asked Siegfried.

"I mean, baron, what flag shall I put up? We've only that of his highness, Prince Albrecht, and I don't know if——"

"Don't trouble yourself about such things. I don't want a flag."

"Very well, your highness." The decision evidently took a load off his heart.

Siegfried dined alone in the enormous, bare dining-room, with its decoration of antlers, one of the sights of Franka, off the dishes prepared for him by the custodian's wife, while Frau Büchler joined the man's family party, and exchanged confidences until late in the night.

Sleep scarcely came at all to Siegfried that night. He revolved plans and projects in his head, and a feverish impatience for decisive action made him jump out of bed, and walk up and down the room for a quarter of an hour at a time.

The next morning he inquired of the custodian concerning the movements of the grand ducal family. The Grand Duke Hilarius was hunting in the Tyrol. The grand duchess was at the palace, preparing to leave in a few days for her yearly visit to Nice.

That suited him. He at once proceeded to the palace. A few pedestrians in the Ditmarstrasse, and in the Castle square recognized him; they stopped in surprise, greeted him, and stared after him. He had changed very little during his four years' absence.

Everything small and great that happened in Franka soon found its way to the palace, and it was known there that Siegfried and his old nurse had suddenly arrived at Castle Lindenheim. With the certainty of a friend of the house, he walked straight past the sentries, servants and officials to the well-known apartments of the Grand

Duchess, and asked the maid, who was in the anteroom, to announce him to her Royal Highness.

He had not long to wait. The maid appeared at the door, and said, curtseying—

"If you please, baron."

Baron! Yes. He must be satisfied with that, provisionally.

He composed his features so that his expression should not betray his bitter thoughts, and entered the little drawing-room, of which only one of the folding doors was opened for him.

The Grand Duchess, in a blue morning-gown, sat at a little table from which the breakfast-tray had not yet been removed. An elderly lady-in-waiting, and a young reader were with her. She signed to them to withdraw. When they had left the room, she stretched out her hand to Siegfried who, after a low bow, had remained near the door, and in the poor thin voice of a sufferer from throat trouble, said, "Welcome to Franka!"

He walked quickly up to her, kissed her hand respectfully, and said, hoarsely—

"I have to thank your royal highness for the kindness with which you have received me."

"Not at all, my dear Siegfried, not at all," she rejoined. "Call me 'aunt,' as in the good old times. You are no stranger to me."

"I have almost feared so, aunt," he said, drawing himself up, and looking into her tired grey eyes.

A shadow flew across the royal lady's thin, pale, but gentle countenance. She replied, turning from the subject—

"Sit down here, Siegfried. I saw you coming across the Castle square, and recognized you at once. You have improved greatly. And it is extraordinary how you resemble my Gotheim brother-in-law. He stands before me as he was thirty years ago."

"I was often told that in Thiodvik, when I was there just lately. I was taken for the crown prince. I was obliged to correct the error, and say I was only an obscure Baron von Gronendal." His words sounded very bitter.

The kindly expression vanished from the Grand Duchess's face. She said more coldly—

"I fear you are always unsettled and discontented. That troubles me. I see your mother's influence in it, and that was never good."

"My mother is dead——"

"Tell me how it happened, and especially how you lived all the time, and what you think of doing now?"

Siegfried briefly related the manner of his mother's sudden death, and continued—

"Since my father's death we have led a wretched existence, like exiles, like outcasts. I have come to Franka in order to see if I can effect some change in my circumstances."

The Grand Duchess looked full at him. She raised her voice a little, and in her excitement became hoarse.

"Your mother was a remarkably gifted and clever woman. We all admired her. She made your father as happy as was possible, considering. And we are grateful to her. But, unhappily, she lost at last all comprehension of her position. That surprised and grieved us. Not so much on her account as on yours. For she stood between us and you and made it impossible for us to show any interest in you. That obstacle is now removed. I earnestly hope that you will return to your natural sphere, like a sensible young man."

"If I only knew what my natural sphere is! I'm the legitimate son of Prince Albrecht of Loewenstein-Franka."

"Siegfried, you are no longer a child. You will be wise not to emphasize that fact. Do you understand me?"

He turned crimson, and looked down.

The princess's soft heart felt a touch of compassion. She cleared her throat and continued in a low voice—

"I did not mean to hurt you; it's not your fault, and I've no wish to throw stones into your mother's grave. No one will dispute your origin, and you may rightly be proud of it. But you must see that you will lose every title to our sympathy if you claim what does not belong to you."

"Aunt, I beg your pardon, but 'claim' is a painful term."

"I'm sorry that I can't avoid using it."

"I feel that I am my father's son. I read in the people's faces that they have a similar impression, and then I open the 'Court guide' and find that my father never had a son."

"Why do you look in the wrong book? You'll find yourself in your rightful place in the 'The Peerage.'"

"Yes, aunt, a place that is a sort of purgatory. There the poor souls are between heaven and hell. They're not to be sent straight to hell. They haven't deserved that. But they are not admitted to Paradise," objected Siegfried.

"Paradise! Our existence seems to you Paradise! Poor boy!" She gave a deep sigh, leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes for a moment.

He waited until she opened them again. "Of course," he said, "I know a prince's life is not all *couleur de rose*. But in a firmly established, recognized position, a man has the strength to bear any fate. If he is always hovering about in a false one——"

"That's your mistake. Baron von Gronendal is in no false position. Your position is only false if you claim a title to which you have no right."

"I beg your pardon, aunt. My blood gives me that right——"

"Now, leave off, Siegfried, or you'll make me angry," said the Grand Duchess, impatiently. "I consider that we fully recognize the rights your blood undoubtedly gives you by looking after you. Your father's Vienna brother will doubtless continue the old allowance if you approach him in proper form. We, too, shall do something for you. You must have inherited theatrical tastes from your mother. You may get a post as director. Indeed, you are of use to us. At the present time thrones cannot have too many trustworthy defenders. Men like you are destined to stand very near the throne, to support it from without like buttresses which organically uphold the inner arches of the dynastical edifice."

She drew a deep breath. After a pause she said exhausted—

"I am talking too much. That is bad for me."

Siegfried got up and made a low bow.

"One thing more," said the Grand Duchess, signing to him to sit down again. "I prefer to tell you now what you will soon hear officially. The Grand Duke has disposed of Castle Lindenheim."

Seigfried started.

"You wouldn't know what to do with such a large house," she went on consolingly. "We gladly left it to your mother as long as she lived, but now that it is free we want it. It is time that our heir"—the childless woman could not repress a sigh—"came to know the country. Prince Godwin is to come from Gotheim and take up his permanent abode here. We've nothing suitable to put at his disposal except Lindenheim. You can remove your furniture, but you would do better, I think, to leave it for Prince Godwin. He will give you a good price for it, and the money will be useful just now. And besides, it will set up relations between you and the prince. It is important for you to stand well with Gotheim. When we are gone, there'll be no one here who knows you, and has cared for you as we have."

"That's my future," he said gloomily. "Cast out of my father's house as well as out of his family, and my compensation a post among the upper servants!"

The Grand Duchess got up with a jerk, and, without turning her head, walked past Siegfried with an energy of movement with which no one would have credited her, and vanished through the door of the next room where her attendants were. He jumped up at once, and looked after her in amazement. He struggled with the impulse to hurry after her and ask her pardon, when the door opened, the elderly lady-in-waiting appeared on the threshold, and said loudly and haughtily—

"Her royal highness desires you to withdraw, Baron von Gronendal."

Siegfried stared at her for a moment, and then went without vouchsafing her a greeting or a word of farewell.

As he paced through the corridors and down the stairs to the great door, he said to himself that it was the last time that place would see him. He was in the same mood as when he left Stormby under similar circumstances. Another thread that bound him to his family, perhaps the last, in any case the strongest and most important, was snapped! He had now lost the favour of his only patroness. He was sorry to have vexed the kindly old lady. And yet he was not wholly dissatisfied with himself. He had at least spoken out plainly what was on his mind.

He next went to his old tutor, Professor Pelgram. He found him in his comfortable, almost luxurious bachelor quarters on the point of sitting down to a nicely laid luncheon-table. He had not seen him for about a year and a half. Pelgram greeted him without extravagant signs of surprise, and invited him to share his modest meal. Only the host, not the meal, was modest. That was choice and superior. Pelgram was an epicure, and was as careful of his cooking and wines as of his books, and his collection of wood engravings—his great hobby.

Professor Pelgram listened to the late experiences of his former pupil over a glass of most excellent Braunberger, "a Christmas gift from his illustrious patron, his Majesty the King of Hageland." Among other courses was a partridge "sent me yesterday by his royal highness, the Grand Duke." He listened in silence, keeping some of his attention for his glasses and dishes, gently shaking his head from time to time sufficiently to show Siegfried that he was following him, but not sufficiently to excite him, or urge him to more emphatic speech.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Pelgram, when Siegfried had finished the account of his interview with the Grand Duchess.

"That's what I want to ask you, professor," returned Siegfried, gloomily.

"My dear Baron Siegfried," said Pelgram, "five years ago I gave you the best advice possible. I recommended you to become an officer. You did not follow it. Now it's too late, I fear, especially since, to my sorrow and surprise, you have quarrelled with your noble patroness

entirely without need or purpose. For her royal highness was quite inclined to be most motherly to you."

An uncomfortable pause ensued.

"So nothing's to be made out of me? I'm good for nothing," asked Siegfried, grimly, after a while.

Pelgram gently shrugged his shoulders. "You were rarely favoured by Fate, but you have obstinately thrust happiness from you whenever it approached you."

"That's how you see my case, is it, professor?"

"No man with any sense could see it otherwise. You are of most distinguished birth——"

"That's my fate."

"Let me speak, my dear Baron Siegfried. You are rich——"

"As poor as a church mouse."

"Because you will have it so. You could have a hundred thousand marks a year, and a man doesn't starve on that. The most brilliant careers are open to you. But you ignore all these actual good things, and chase a dream."

"A dream? The one good thing that is of any value to me, and that is legitimately mine."

Pelgram left off smiling, and said, very seriously, "In the long years during which I had the training of your mind, I failed in teaching you the right views about one of the most essential questions of humanity. For this I must reproach myself. Although you are now beyond my instruction, will you permit me to try and make up for my neglect."

This exordium was spoken in the solemn tone he had been accustomed to use when lecturing on the history of the house of Meissen. The old influence worked on Siegfried, and he unconsciously became, once again, in the presence of the tutor, the somewhat stubborn but submissive pupil of former days.

"I take it for granted, my dear Baron Siegfried, that you are a Monarchist?"

"Certainly, so far as it is made possible for me."

"That's a stupid answer. A thoughtful and moral man must be a Monarchist without reference to his personal

interests. The interests of morality stand higher than those of the individual, no matter who he may be. But monarchy is the pledge of morality, for without monarchy there can only be anarchy, and a falling back into barbarism.

"Where do you put France?" asked Siegfried.

"Wait, my dear Baron Siegfried. France is now feeding on its rich monarchical inheritance. When that is used up, you'll see how it gets on with its Republic. Monarchy is the ideal form of government, for it assures the citizens the greatest measure of freedom possible in a community founded on order and discipline."

Astonishment pervaded Siegfried's countenance, and he was about to speak when Pelgram commandingly prevented him.

"Attend to me, instead of going off the point, for I want to put it briefly and clearly. Where any one can obtain the highest power, the ruling party must treat the party that wants to rule as an enemy, and keep it down. In a monarchy the reward of party struggle is not rule, the struggle is an intellectual one of views and thoughts, and need not degenerate into the oppression of the minority by the majority. In order that the monarch may fulfil the task which the profound theory of monarchy points out to him, he must be as immutable as an element, or as a law of nature; more correctly he must be a symbol and divest himself of the changeable human elements so far as human nature allows. But he can only remain a symbol if his origins are mythical. No one must have seen his genesis."

"And Napoleon? And the new dynasties that are only a hundred years old?"

"Napoleon desired to be his own grandson. But that did not help him. His grandfather came to grief. He could not prevent it. He could not have done so under any circumstances, not even without the wars of independence. New dynasties are only possible in the east, where the people are accustomed to despotism and slavery. We, the Aryan peoples of Central Europe are too developed and too proud for that sort of thing. We will

submit ourselves to none whom we have known as our equal, and who has come to the top like a gymnast or a wrestler. We will suffer a symbol, a thought, to rule us, but not a clenched fist."

"But what has all this to do with my case, professor?"

"I am just coming to that. Monarchy can only work out its full blessing when its representative is of a historical, or I prefer to keep to my former word, a mythical dynasty. Happy the people who can boast such a monarch. It is an hereditary position that nothing can replace. That people has every reason to preserve its dynasty jealously. It may not suffer it to come down from its unapproachable heights. Therefore the dynasty must inexorably preserve equality of birth, and must under no circumstances admit elements which might drag it down into the circle of ordinary, middle-class interests, family concerns and relations."

"Thank you, professor. New blood seems to you quite superfluous?"

"Quite. Whether the prince is handsome or less handsome, clever or less clever, is of no importance. He represents a principle. He is a symbol. His corporeal organization is of no account. But our princes are, as men, splendid examples of their race, and that they have gained by breeding in and in."

"I am obliged to you for the verdict you pronounce on my mother and me."

"Present company is always excepted. There is no need to state that, I conclude. The enchanted circle which surrounds historical or mythical dynasties must remain perfectly impenetrable. The religion of Monarchism demands it."

"Then the members of the dynasties must only marry women of their own family, and have no children except by mothers of equal birth."

"That is my opinion."

"But as they have done it and do do it——"

"Then they have stepped outside the enchanted circle and there is no return for them, nor for their posterity.

That is the solution of the painful problem. Not only are you not Prince of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka, but Prince Albrecht ceased to be so through his marriage. The soul of the German people has always clearly recognized this, and expressed it in significant legends, in the legends of Hans Heyling, of the elves and nixies who marry mortals and so forth. The immortal who stoops to a mortal loses his divinity. Therein lies tragedy, and sometimes beauty."

"Whether I can disprove your words, I can't say. But everything in me rebels against your doctrine. It can't be right."

"It is indisputable."

"I am a living man of flesh and blood, and you wish to slay me by an icy theory. I am stronger than the theory."

"You are mistaken, my dear Baron Siegfried. The icy theory is stronger than the living man of flesh and blood."

"We shall see."

"Not at all. Don't take the wrong turning; I know how obstinate you are. I don't blame you. It is a form of strength of character, and is the best thing you've inherited. But turn that royal virtue to a better purpose, to something attainable. Remain with us, spend your allowance here as the great nobleman you can be, marry according to your rank, and you can look very high, for we have so many princesses that they must consent to marry educated people of lower rank, if they don't wish to remain single, and become the founder of a line of able Gronendals. Then you will not have lived in vain."

Siegfried's face grew crimson. "I seem to be useful in your eyes as a breeding animal. You don't seem to think I'm good for anything else. Well, professor, I've eaten your bread and drunk your wine, and, as your guest, do not wish to behave discourteously. You have been frank with me, very frank——"

"It was my duty, as your old tutor——"

"Let me speak now—in my turn. I will now be

frank with you. It is I who made you a professor and a well-to-do state pensioner——"

"You?"

"I, my dear Professor Pelgram. You were rewarded for your artistic piece of work—my education. But what have you made of me? You continued and finished my father's work. If my father did not wish to make a prince of me, he should have made me a peasant or an artisan. But, no, he made nothing of me, and you helped him as far as lay in your power."

Pelgram got up, with an ashen face and furious eyes. "Baron von Gronendal!"

"Don't interrupt me," thundered Siegfried, and, drawn up to his full height, he looked so terrible that the slight, clever, cool-headed tutor of princes, and courtier trembled to his very marrow. "You only wanted to please my father and the Grand Duke, and never thought that a time would come when I should pass judgment on you, your methods, and your intentions. Perhaps you thought me too stupid. I now correct that view. You are responsible, in any case, partly responsible, that I am good for nothing except to be a prince and to marry! Well, I mean to try and be something in spite of you. It will be amateur work, for I learnt nothing from you. So much the worse. I will show you that I am stronger than all of you. And if I fail, you'll know, professor, on whom the responsibility rests." He spoke the last words in a tone of penetrating, steely scorn, bowed, and with long strides, left the room and the house. He was in such a hurry that he pulled his overcoat violently from the peg on which it hung in the hall, and only put it on when he had gained the street.

Pelgram sank back in his chair. His legs refused to support him. The same evening he wrote a detailed report to the Grand Duke in which he stated unreservedly, that he did not consider young Baron von Gronendal of sound mind, and strongly recommended that he should be placed under supervision, and that his derangement should not be treated as harmless.

The treatment that Siegfried received everywhere so

embittered and excited him that he was in a sort of Berserker fury, and lost all self-control, all command over his thoughts, words, or actions, all common sense or consideration. He went straight from Pelgram to his parents' lawyer, and told him, with a violence and roughness which surprised and hurt the conventional old man, to proceed at once and as quickly as possible, with the sale of the furniture to the heir apparent, since his one wish was to have done with the whole business.

The chamberlain's office had all the necessary powers, and put the matter in hand at once. At the end of four days, during which Siegfried either shut himself up in his room, or wandered about the park, the matter was concluded. Siegfried knew that the contents of the house, not including gifts in the form of objects of art, curiosities, and a few valuables, had cost over one hundred thousand marks. They offered him sixty thousand marks under the express condition that everything the Castle contained should be included in the purchase, with the exception of the furniture of three bedrooms, and two portraits of the baroness of which they "did not wish to rob" her son. Siegfried gave the furniture to Frau Büchler, whom he left at Franka, sent the paintings carefully packed to the repository at Paris, placed the money in a Vienna bank, and shook the dust of Franka from his feet.

He immediately went to Vienna, entered himself in the hotel register as the Count von Gleichen, and then drove to the Franka-Level palace. Fortunately his uncle was in town. The porter who opened the door, and gave him the desired information about the duke, referred him to a footman, who took him to one of the officials of the house. Siegfried told him he wished to see the duke.

"Have you a letter of audience?" asked the official.

"It's not necessary," answered Siegfried, curtly.

The tone and the personal appearance of the visitor impressed the official.

"With whom have I the honour to speak?"

"Announce me as his nephew, Prince Albrecht's son."

"Ah!" said the official, smiled, bowed, signed to him to sit down, and departed.

Siegfried was left a very long time alone in the room chiefly furnished with shelves filled with registers. He had ample time to reflect on his situation as an unrecognized stranger in this lordly house which his grandfather had built, in which his father was born and had lived until he reached manhood.

At last the official reappeared. He was now stiff and cold.

"His highness is busy and cannot see you, baron." He laid particular emphasis on the title. "But Privy-councillor Stepanski asks you to go to him for a moment."

Stepanski was the agent for the administration of the Franka-Level ducal estates.

Siegfried was within an ace of giving loud vent to his rage. But he had sense enough to recognize that violence towards an inferior would only make him ridiculous. After a brief struggle with himself, he said—

"Where is the privy-councillor?"

"Please follow me, baron."

After traversing a corridor and an anteroom, Siegfried found himself in the presence of the old gentleman, with his gold spectacles and short white moustache. He came forward politely, and, pointing to a chair, asked—

"What brings you here, baron?"

"I wish to speak to my uncle, and not to you, sir."

"His highness has asked me to receive you in his stead."

"Why does my uncle shut his door on me?"

"The reason of his highness's decision is as little known to me as it would be possible for me to influence it."

"Can you tell me if my allowance is to be continued in the future?"

"Yes, baron, Jean and I am sorry to inform you that it was paid to your lawyer four days ago for the last time. His highness deems it advisable to discontinue it."

Siegfried burst into a short, grim laugh. "Well, that's nice! I'm not only thrust out of the family but condemned to die of hunger as well. That's the simplest way to get

rid of me. And you think that I shall submit to this new robbery?"

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders, and looked over his spectacles up to the ceiling. His calmness increased Siegfried's rage.

"The allowance is no favour, but my right. The deed of foundation of our entail compels the eldest of the family to make suitable provision for his relations. There are judges! I will force him to do his duty."

"We will run the risk of that."

Siegfried jumped up. "I will see if my uncle will repeat that to my face." He made as if to hurry out.

The privy-councillor hastily got up. "Baron, I implore you, no violence. What could you gain? There are twenty men in the palace in his highness's service, not to mention the police."

Siegfried, who was already at the door, turned round, and with a bound was at the privy-councillor's side.

"You stoop to threaten me. Another word, and I'll——"

"It's not very heroic to attack a man old enough to be your grandfather."

The remark brought Siegfried to his senses. He wiped his hot face, and stammered—

"That is what is offered me under my grandfather's and father's roof, a roof that, under other circumstances, might have been my own."

"You invoke your illustrious ancestors, and yet you insult them, even in the grave."

"I?"

"You, baron. No one else would have dared."

"I have insulted my ancestors? How and where?"

"In your pamphlet, which has been sent to the courts, and in which you deny equality of birth and a rightful place in the dynasty to the Level branch of the Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka house.

"It was not meant so. And besides, I did not originate the opinion."

"That we know. But before it was sent, you must have read it, and we take it that you were able to judge

the bearing of the contents of the disgraceful effusion. That is why his highness has withdrawn his favour, and if you would recover it, you must call in the pamphlet formally and publicly, and ask his highness's pardon for the stain put on his coat-of-arms."

Siegfried said nothing.

"Take my advice, baron, and make it up with his highness. You can do it without in any way demeaning yourself, for your inexperience has made you the victim of an unscrupulous cheat. Osterburg is your evil spirit. He has embroiled you with your family, in order to fleece you. We know everything. Did you know that he robbed you of fifty thousand gulden through a pretended sale?"

"Through a pretended sale?"

"He obtained half his sister's house for you for fifty per cent. above its value, and a few months after bought it back for his sister for fifty thousand gulden cheaper."

"Can that be proved?"

"At any moment."

"Then I may at least thank you for the information. Good-bye."

He was gone before the councillor could say a word, and he contented himself with looking after him and shaking his head.

Siegfried was in Dr. von Osterburg's office as quickly as a swift Vienna cab could take him. He took no heed of the director of the office, who told him that the lawyer was engaged with a client; he pushed him aside like a piece of thistledown when he tried to bar his way, tore open the door without ceremony, and entered Osterburg's room.

When Osterburg saw him he changed colour, jumped up and exclaimed—

"You here, bar—prince! What a surprise! I thought you were in Paris!" He stretched out his hand; but Siegfried ignored the movement.

With a few whispered words, Osterburg dismissed the gentleman with whom he had been talking, accompanied him to the door, and said, after he had shut it behind his visitor—

"I was going to write to you to-day, prince. Welcome to Vienna, prince. I am glad to see you, prince."

Without waiting for an invitation, Siegfried sat down, crossed his legs, and said, looking Osterburg full in the face—

"I know nothing about that. Let us come to the point. I have just learned on trustworthy authority that the house you procured for us at a hundred and fifty thousand gulden belonged to your sister, and that you bought it back again for your sister for a hundred thousand gulden.

"Indeed! May I know who told you that?"

"That is of no consequence. Is it true?"

Osterburg had entirely regained his composure.

"Certainly it is true. It is no secret. A visit to the Land Register Office would confirm that simple fact. Whoever told you that as a terrible revelation has permitted himself an unseemly joke at the expense of your inexperience in business."

"You consider it right and just that through this peculiar business you have—well, shall we say—deprived me of fifty thousand gulden."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you, Herr von Osterburg."

"I beg your pardon. Not I, but my sister, who is married and independent. There is nothing peculiar about the business, it is entirely usual. Whoever says the contrary is guilty of malicious slander. As I considered it necessary that you should purchase house property in Vienna, I was very glad to find my sister ready to sell her house. At that time you could not have found a better price and more favourable conditions of mortgage. You have certainly lost by the sale; but that's always the case, if a man wishes suddenly to sell at any price at an unfavourable time of the year. If my sister had not been willing to buy it, you would have had to deplore a much greater loss. I got nothing out of the business but my modest legal fees and your thanks, prince, for my trouble in furthering your interests."

Siegfried was no match for this man. His desire for

attack died away. A moment later, he gave up the struggle and answered Osterburg's inquiries. He described his interview with Stepanski. Osterburg listened, smiling, and stroking his splendid beard, and Siegfried did not contradict him when he remarked—

"The blow has told, then. We have hit your illustrious family in a sensitive place. We must hammer away at it. They think to frighten you by stopping your allowance. I hope you aren't destitute of means?"

"No."

"Capital, capital." He rubbed his hands. "Now we'll carry the thing through; we'll push forward our journalistic and parliamentary troops. We'll bring your struggle for your most sacred rights into publicity. We shall win. Perhaps we shan't get everything. But we can afford some concessions when it comes to a treaty of peace. We shall, of course, stand by our claims for a rightful allowance. As regards the question of the title——"

"That's the essential thing!"

"Yes, certainly. If the family are willing to create a new title for you, and to acknowledge you in the coat-of-arms by an additional sign, if I were you, I would be satisfied. Our illustrious archducal family, the deceased Elector of Hesse, the Russian Imperial family, and other reigning houses have done it constantly."

Siegfried pricked up his ears. "Has anything of the kind been offered?"

Osterburg smiled mysteriously. "Offered—well—if you mean a formal offer—no. But I repeat, there seems to me here a basis for a treaty of peace, but only if the family are convinced of our seriousness, and of the effect of our weapons."

Siegfried pressed Osterburg to give him a more decisive answer, but in vain. He got nothing but evasive, ambiguous speeches which, however, left the impression: "No smoke without fire." Siegfried alluded to his last quarter's allowance which the lawyer had received, and Osterburg advised Siegfried to leave the five thousand gulden with him for current and future expenses in the

matter of the press campaign, and promised to account for it punctually. Siegfried was entirely conquered, and as he went out the clerks saw a calm, almost cheerful-looking, young man, whom their chief accompanied into the hall, smiling and pleased, and of whom he took farewell with handshakings, and wishes to meet soon again.

Remark and gossip occurred in Siegfried's hotel when a reporter from the *Volksblatt* came in the afternoon and inquired for the Prince of Loewenstein-Franka. On hearing that no guest of that name was there, he added that perhaps he was known as Baron von Gronendal. Siegfried had forgotten, when he gave Osterburg his address, to add that he called himself the Count von Gleichen. The reporter refused to be convinced, declared that he was certain of his facts, and guided by Osterburg's cursory remarks, began to describe, with professional genius, the personal appearance of the man he sought.

"Perhaps you mean the Count von Gleichen——"

"That's just whom I do mean," replied the reporter, without hesitation, and asked to be taken to him.

A prince, who is at the same time a baron, and writes himself down a count—who travels without attendants, and with very little luggage—made the managers, upper waiters, and porter, think that the young man was a swindler, and that it was necessary to keep an eye on him, and to communicate discreetly with the police.

The reporter welcomed his highness to his native town, asked about his impressions, about his future plans, and when he could extract no answer, turned the conversation to Paris and his life there. At the end of the interview, he asked for a portrait of his highness, but as Siegfried had not got one with him, he could not comply with the request. But it did not matter in the least. The *Volksblatt* published next morning a picture which bore a certain distant likeness to every young man with a small moustache, accompanied by three columns of printed matter which, after a flattering introduction concerning his highness, placed a number of significant, clever and paradoxical remarks in the mouth "of the

young Prince of the Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level family, personally unknown at the Court of Vienna in consequence of his many years' sojourn abroad."

The article attracted attention. All the evening papers copied it. The next number of the *Volksblatt* contained a contribution from Privy-councillor Stepanski, who stated, in the name and by the desire of his Highness the Duke of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level, that the paper was the victim of a mystification, that the gentleman who had been interviewed, and who had given himself out as a Prince Loewenstein-Level, was the legitimate son of the morganatic marriage of the deceased Baroness von Gronendal, and had not the slightest right to the title he assumed.

Siegfried hastened with the paper to Osterburg.

"What now?" he asked.

"Our affair's going splendidly. The discussion is opened. We shall now reply, and publicly prove our right. It surpasses my boldest hopes that your uncle should have at once flown to the newspaper."

"I leave the conduct of the legal proof to you," said Siegfried, firmly, "but I shall challenge my uncle."

When Osterburg heard this, he assumed at first a thoughtful expression, but after some reflection, it seemed to him that Siegfried could not act otherwise, for the correction had been needlessly insulting. He refused, however, while politely, but firmly, thanking him for the honour, to act as bearer of the challenge. His professional position made that impossible. Siegfried was an entire stranger in Vienna; to whom could he turn? Osterburg came to the rescue. He introduced him to one of his clerks, a clever lawyer and a reserve officer.

The clerk was not charmed by the request, but did not dare to place his position with Osterburg in jeopardy by a refusal. With great presence of mind he demanded an advance of money, for carriages and some additions to his toilette, and set out for the Ducal Palace.

He soon came back. He had not been admitted, had not even seen Privy-councillor Stepanski. He had only spoken with inferior officials, who replied to his appeal

with a shrug of the shoulders, and advised him to put his business in writing. Siegfried wrote the duke a short note in which he challenged him, and demanded seconds, and sent the young man back to the palace with it.

After being kept waiting a long time, the young man was received by Privy-councillor Stepanski, who returned him Siegfried's letter, told him it was all silly nonsense, and that his highness the duke refused to be worried by such things.

Siegfried was pale with excitement. Without listening to Osterburg, he sent the following lines to his uncle.

"To the Duke of Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level in Vienna.

"You have no son whom I can call out in your stead for the insult to my dead mother. I must, therefore, address myself to you, although you are an old man in comparison with me. If you do not apologize, or render me the satisfaction of a gentleman within twenty-four hours, I shall take it wherever I may meet you.

"Siegfried von Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka-Level."

Then he returned to the hotel and awaited the consequences. Long before the twenty-four hours were past, they came in the shape of a police official, who ordered him to go with him. He offered him some advice.

"Baron von Gronendal, you give yourself out for a prince, which you are not. You write yourself in the hotel register as Count von Gleichen, which you are not any the more. You annoy persons in high stations with threatening letters. By such conduct, and by transgressing the rules about audiences, you have made yourself liable to be punished by law. Out of consideration for your birth, however, justice will be tempered with mercy, and you will be expelled the territory of the monarchy as an undesirable alien."

Siegfried objected, raging, but in vain. The official advised him to give heed to his words, for there were

limits to the clemency shown him. He pleaded that he was an Austrian, and could not be turned out. The official replied, "The contrary opinion is held here." He asked for time so that he might enter a complaint at the ministry, appeal to the Emperor, or at least communicate with his lawyer. The official regretted to be compelled to refuse. The only thing that was allowed him was to get a cheque cashed at his bank through a police officer. For some hours he was detained under surveillance in a comfortably furnished bureau, where he was provided with books, newspapers, writing materials, and a meal. Then he was taken to the railway-station. The police paid his hotel bill, and procured the tickets for the train. He found a place reserved for him in the sleeping-car, and the railway servants were most obliging throughout the day. But the same two inspectors who had accompanied him to the station, also took places in the sleeping-car, and sat almost the whole night before the door of Siegfried's compartment. About four o'clock in the morning they opened it quietly, and looked in.

Siegfried was not asleep. He sat up, and asked, "What do you want?"

"Nothing, nothing, sir; pardon!" said the policeman, subserviently. "We are nearly at Freilassing, where we get out, and we have only acted in accordance with our office. Excuse us, sir; a pleasant journey."

"Oh, then I'm free! Wait a moment." He reached for the purse in his coat-pocket, took out a hundred-gulden note, and said, "Take this for yourself and your colleague, to remind you that you accompanied a prince."

"We see that, sir," replied the delighted officer, and vanished amid bows.

The ticket that the police had taken for him was for Munich. Siegfried spent two days in the Bavarian capital. A thousand plans were simmering in his head. At first he would return to Austria by another route, spy on his uncle in secret, and attack him, let the consequences be what they might. But when he thought it over, and remembered that the old gentleman scarcely reached to

his shoulder, he felt ashamed. He put himself in telegraphic communication with Osterburg, and received long messages in reply, imploring him to keep quiet, and assuring him that the episode was most advantageous for the Press campaign, and would win him sympathy everywhere.

What was he to do now? He came upon a notice in a newspaper, at which he was glancing in a *café*, about the extraordinary success of a young singer at Diesa—Fräulein Nicoline Aseid. It described her *début* at the opera there, and added that, notwithstanding the somewhat Arabic sound of her name, she was a German, daughter of the well-known Frau Carlotta Flammert.

"To Diesa to see Nicoline!" he suddenly thought. But only for a moment. No, he had no right. He had not acted to her as he ought. He had been ready to part from her. Ought he to bind himself again to her as if the journey to Trouville had never taken place? And what had he to do in Diesa? Especially now when he had experienced such deep humiliation! Measure his defeat by her success? She was more, he was less than ever. Less? He was nothing. She would perhaps receive him affectionately. But what could come of it? To live near her as an appendage until he had spent his last penny, and then marry her in order to assure himself board and lodging as the husband of his wife? He trembled at the mere thought.

He felt it his duty as an honourable man to write to Nicoline in accordance with their arrangement and formally give her back her word. But he did not do it, from modesty he persuaded himself, but in reality from an obscure, very much more deeply rooted feeling. He did not know if he loved her. His was not a loving temperament. He received strong impressions, but he preserved cool and superficial remembrance of them. He would not set Nicoline free. She was the reserve which he could not do without. His dreams flew to her when the future appeared most wretched. He was not conscious of the selfishness of his point of view.

Yes. He would keep her for a time. Who knows—

perhaps one day he would fetch her. And he indulged in all sorts of wild dreams. Confused fragments formed themselves into a series of dim pictures of the future, one or the other of which would be realized. He thought he knew what he would do.

Back to Paris!

BOOK VI

Frau Flammert's annual holiday of two months began shortly after her return from Paris. She went to Wallesroda, a beautiful place situated amid hills and forests, where she had been accustomed for years to find rest and recreation. The choice, however, was not entirely due to its natural beauties, but to the circumstance that at the end of the valley, a very short distance from her hired villa, Prince Johann had a shooting-box, where he spent most of the period of the singer's holiday.

During the early days at Wallesroda, Nicoline was strangely reserved and thoughtful. At first, after the year's separation, she had been very demonstrative in her affection for her mother. But as soon as they were settled at Wallesroda, Nicoline sought solitude, and either sat in the arbour in the little garden behind the house, or in her bedroom, or wandered through the forest, remaining out for hours, till her mother became almost anxious. But she took no notice, for she thought her daughter was probably regretting Paris, or thinking of the future that promised to be so brilliant, perhaps, too, of young Gronendal. She did not doubt that such impressions would gradually fade away. So she waited with sympathetic reserve on her own part, until Nicoline should of herself recover her balance.

She was, however, much disturbed, when one lovely morning in the first week of August, she asked Nicoline at breakfast how she had slept, and received the reply—

"Very badly, mummy dear, very badly; like every night since I left Paris. But I shall be better now, for I've fought it out with myself. My decision is made.

Mummy, we'll write to-day to a lawyer, perhaps to Dr. Leyding, so that he may arrange for a divorce."

"Wha—at?" exclaimed Frau Flammert, and stared at Nicoline in horror, as if she thought the child had taken leave of her senses.

"Yes, mummy. It's time I took your affairs in hand, and reduced them to order. And first you must get a divorce. The connection is unworthy of you. It's a shame that you should bear that name. From what we know of Flammert, he'll make no difficulty, if we pay him well. That was why I thought of the premium in our contract with Grün."

Frau Flammert seemed entirely overcome. She struggled for breath. At last she stammered out—

"But, Nico—whatever makes you—fall on me so suddenly—I had no sort of idea——"

Nicoline left her chocolate untouched, came round the table to her mother, drew a chair to her side, and put her arms round her.

"Mother," she said, seriously and firmly, "it must be. Let me act. I do not choose that my darling, splendid mummy shall live in ambiguous and embarrassing circumstances any longer."

Frau Flammert pushed her daughter away. "I have got quite accustomed to them. I have only one desire—peace, rest. And now you're going to involve me in terrible excitement and worry."

"But, mummy, what an absurd idea! You represent it all as so dreadful—rely on me; it'll go as easily as anything. Flammert will be glad to drive a second bargain with you on which he had never reckoned."

"But why? why?"

"Why? You've borne a name which sullies you long enough. It doesn't matter to me. For I shall make a name for myself. But for you. The hateful business is a stain on your life. It's time we wiped it out."

Frau Flammert's face began to work, and she burst into tears.

Nicoline embraced her mother again, and kissed away her tears.

"Mummy, don't cry," she said, in her softest, most affectionate voice. "I alone of all human beings know your life, and know how perfectly pure and true it is. You are compact of faith and duty. Such virtue and nobility must not be obscured any longer by this mock marriage."

"What will people say?"

"They've said all they had to say long ago. You've only to think of yourself. And believe me, they would have respected Fräulein Carlotta Scholz just as much as Frau Carlotta Flammert. You have the right to acknowledge your real life, and you must have the courage to do it. It's no disgrace; it's an honour. If others have treated you badly, your simple integrity stands out all the more."

Frau Flammert struggled with herself. Finally she brought out with difficulty—

"But the prince—he won't."

Nicoline became violently excited. "The prince! What has it to do with him? Whether he will or will not isn't of the least consequence. We do what seems to be right and good for us. The prince! You've been his humble victim long enough. It must cease. I won't endure it any longer. You've always been defenceless. Now you have some one to defend you."

"But I'll not submit to a state of war. I do not agree——"

"Don't worry, mummy; it won't come to that. It is not necessary to ask the prince for his opinion. He can be told when the deed is done. If he gets wind of it sooner, well, that won't hurt. He has always intimidated you. Your birth and education did not fit you to look the brother of your sovereign straight in the face and to assert yourself. It's only natural that I should take a different view."

Having thus made up her mind, and informed her mother, Nicoline took the divorce in hand. She wrote to Dr. Leyding, a distinguished Diesa lawyer, and an old friend of theirs, and put before him the plan of pleading malevolent desertion on Flammert's part. Then he should

find out from Flammert under what conditions he would agree not to oppose a divorce and begged him to settle the business as quickly as possible.

Dr. Leyding was quite ready. He went himself to Flammert, who had grown fat and old as second director, and a player of small parts, at the Court Theatre of Märwurt, and entered into verbal negotiations. The man was vastly astonished to hear from his wife. She had long ceased to play any part in his life, and he had almost forgotten her existence. He jumped at the proposal, for he scented a capital opportunity for gentle pressure, and his sole thought was to secure the most favourable conditions. Happily in his narrow surroundings his desires were modest. He demanded five thousand marks down, and an annuity of twelve hundred marks to be purchased for him at a first-rate insurance office, and could hardly believe it possible when it was all agreed to within twenty-four hours. He imagined they would offer him less than he asked, and he had therefore demanded double in order to get the half with which he would have been perfectly contented. He did not understand why his wife should make what seemed to him a considerable sacrifice in order to free herself from fetters which pressed so lightly; but he did not trouble his head over it. Dr. Leyding was not able to settle the business during the vacation, and so, after the lawyer had obtained all that was needed from Flammert, Nicoline had to curb her impatience until October. She conducted the correspondence with Dr. Leyding herself in order to spare her mother all the trouble possible. At this stage of the proceedings, Frau Flammert only had to sign her name a few times. But Nicoline could not spare her the unpleasantness of the Conciliation Court and final proceedings, which, though not carried out in public, required Frau Flammert's presence at Märwurt. But they were mere formalities, and all concerned made them as little trying as possible. On both occasions Flammert's conduct was perfect. His greeting of the wife he would scarcely have recognized in the street, the respectful manner in which he held aloof at the Court of Justice, the loyal fashion in

which he acknowledged his faults towards his wife, his broken-heartedness at the announcement of the verdict, were remarkable performances, far beyond his average powers of acting. Nicoline learned later that the man who passed for her father before the law, married, a few weeks after the divorce, a well-to-do woman, the widow of a hotel-keeper, whose boarder he had been for years. She only hoped that her mother would never hear of this ending to the vulgar farce of her marriage, for it brought to light the meanness of the treatment she had suffered for so many years.

Prince Johann always spent the first half of August at the well-known watering-place, Warmbronn, where, notwithstanding the little interest he took in the turf, he had to perform his duties as representative and president and patron of the Racing Society. It was one of the few occasions on which he managed to break away from his accustomed habits, and to leave Frau Flammert for a while. But she was not quite free all the same. She had to write to the prince every day, and give him a detailed account of all that concerned her. On his part, he generally contented himself with sending her a telegram daily without signature, and a letter with a more detailed account of his doings once or twice during his absence. Frau Flammert had of course told him about her journey to Paris, about Nicoline's success, and her brilliant contract with Grün, and in a postscript the prince had remarked—

"The little one's getting on splendidly. I'm very glad."

At length one afternoon, the prince's gillie appeared; he was an old and confidential servant, and had been in the service of the former Grand Duke. He announced that his master had arrived at the shooting-box and would come to dinner.

Nicoline had longed for this moment ever since she had got into the train with her mother at Paris. So long as she could remember, with the exception of the rare and brief absences from Diesa and Wallesroda, the prince had always come to tea every day, and to dinner two or three

times a week. She had been trained to leave the room when the prince entered it. She kissed his hand, and greeted him; occasionally he patted her on the cheek, and still more rarely invited her to stay in the room. When he dined with them, she was sometimes of the party, but only if the prince specially asked her. After her confirmation the hand-kissing was discontinued, and replaced by a curtsey and a handshake. Ever since she could speak she had addressed him as "your royal highness," and he had called her, "little one," or when he was in a particularly good humour, "Nico." Of late years her keen blue eyes had seen through everything, and her clear, penetrating intelligence had understood all. She knew that little Nicoline Flammert was the daughter of his royal highness, Prince Johann of Meissen-Diesa-Kupferberg, brother of the reigning Grand Duke, brother-in-law of the King of Frankenland. Her father's cool, uncle-like friendliness was a continual source of pain to her. She could no longer bring herself to call him "your royal highness," and avoided addressing him directly so cleverly that no one noticed it. She had had plenty of time and cause in Paris to think over her circumstances, and in proportion as old habits were lost, and the picture of her maternal home receded into the distance, she clearly saw that it would no longer be possible for her to return to the old ways. In her dreams she set things right as her deep love for her mother, her pride of birth, and her sense of justice demanded, and when her castle in the air was finished, it pleased her so much, that she vowed to do all in her power to give reality to the dream-building. It seemed to her of good omen that after the return from Paris she would have her mother to herself for a long time, and would be able to prepare for the part she intended to play. The divorce was the most pressing thing, and must be brought forward first. When it was accomplished, her mother would not suffer too deeply if a finger was laid on another painful place; and if only she would blindly trust herself to her daughter's plans, Nicoline could proceed with the further tasks.

Now the meeting with Prince Johann was at hand.

The prologue was over. The play was going to begin. She suffered more from stage fright than she would have thought possible. She would have been glad if something could have prevented her appearance on the stage. She was angry with herself, for her weakness and pusillanimity.

"Are you the brave Nicoline who fears neither death nor devils, who shoots down her enemies with revolvers, who is preparing to conquer the world?" she asked herself in bitter self-contempt, and was ashamed of her beating heart, her changing colour, her trembling limbs. She made the greatest efforts to control her agitation; she called up all the pictures that had given her for months past so much inward satisfaction, and gradually her terror vanished, and her cool composure returned.

With the punctuality of royalty, Prince Johann rang at the door of the villa at two o'clock.

The prince was a tall, strong, and still handsome man, with a beard, once fair, now getting grey, which made him strikingly like the Emperor Frederick, a thin, straight nose, rather full lips, and large commanding blue eyes under fair bushy eyebrows. The grey moustache was loyally twisted into perpendicular points, and the proportionately small head was bald.

Frau Flammert looked anxiously at Nicoline when the bell rang. She returned her mother's glance with one that was perfectly calm and open, although her face gradually became very red. The prince entered the little simply furnished room a moment later. He was dressed in a grey hunting suit, with light green facings and horn buttons. Frau Flammert went quickly forward to meet him; he chivalrously kissed her hand, and exclaimed, pleased and smiling—

"Well, Lotta, how are you? Everything right!" Turning to Nicoline, who had risen and curtseyed, "Well, so we've got the little Parisian back again! It doesn't seem to have done you any harm. And so you mean to be a great singer. Well! I congratulate you—I congratulate you."

Then came from Nicoline the clear distinct answer, "Thank you, papa."

The prince's legs remained as if rooted to the spot, but the upper part of his body started back with a sudden jerk, as when a man sinks under a blow he has not been able to parry, and from his throat escaped a half-articulated—

"Wha——!"

"I say; thank you, papa!" repeated Nicoline, slowly, firmly, pitilessly, sounding every syllable.

The prince turned round, threw a glance at Frau Flammert, who had sunk into a chair, and was gazing at Nicoline with wide-opened, terrified eyes, and without a word, and with great strides, left the room.

Frau Flammert jumped up, and began to hurry after him, exclaiming—

"But Hänsel!"

Nicoline kept her back with a firm grasp, until the iron gate fell clattering into the lock.

"For Heaven's sake, child, what are you doing?" exclaimed Frau Flammert, wringing her hands. "Why? Why? You should have told me what you meant to do. I understand, that you—that you don't—I can fully sympathise with you. But that was too brutal, so sudden, after a whole lifetime."

Nicoline let her mother have her say out, and then replied calmly.

"Mummy, my best, my darling, be calm. I acted quite rightly. I have already told you that I won't have any more lies round me. I must and will put everything straight. I will have a thorough clearing up."

Frau Flammert began to sob. "Child, you are stronger than I am. I'm no match for you. But I never thought you would abuse your strength."

"Abuse! Mother!"

"Hitherto, my life has been peaceful and not unhappy, whatever you may think. Now you bring storm and stress into it and destroy everything."

"I destroy nothing. I build up. Only let me act."

"I cannot suddenly change my life, and break relations that are my whole existence."

"But of course not. Who asks you to do that?"

"You've scared the prince away with your unexpected behaviour."

"Be calm, mother; he'll come back."

"No, child; you don't know him. When he thinks that his dignity is injured, he's not to be appeased."

"He'll come back, and quickly, too. He can't live without you. If you don't yourself prevent it, he'll think it over, come to his senses, will see that open relations are better than deceit, which, as everybody sees through it, is really impudent. Do you really think it becoming that I should go on calling him your royal highness, and go out of the room, like a good little child, whenever he comes. It is inconceivable. If he wants to be comfortable here, the truth must be acknowledged."

Frau Flammert slowly shook her head, and did not appear convinced.

The servant came in, and asked if they would wait for his royal highness. The dinner was getting spoiled. Mother and daughter got up and went to table. But Frau Flammert could eat nothing, although, at a sign from her, the prince's place had been cleared away.

Nicoline continued, "Mother, be comforted. What I did was only to clear the air; and I have cleared it. We shall all breathe more easily. I'm sure my father will come back. If he doesn't, it will prove that he was never worthy of you. If he can leave you so easily, then you must do the same more easily. I expect and demand that of your pride. I can't allow my mother to throw herself away."

She spoke the last words so loudly and violently, that her terrified mother whispered—

"S-sh."

Notwithstanding her straightforward and strong nature, Nicoline, with the natural astuteness of her sex, did not ignore side issues and secret designs. She did not leave her mother alone the whole afternoon and evening, and did not stir from her side when she spoke of a sick headache, and the efficacy of a walk in the forest. She suspected that Frau Flammert would slink away to the

shooting-box, and was determined to prevent anything of the kind.

Early the next morning, the gillie appeared with a letter from the prince. Nicoline kept careful watch. She took the missive out of the maid's hand, and carried it to her mother, who was not yet up. Frau Flammert turned very red, hurriedly tore open the envelope, read the note, and crushed it in her hand. Nicoline asked quietly—

"What does papa say?"

"You're going to spy on my correspondence now," exclaimed Frau Flammert.

"Of course," replied Nicoline, and got possession of the paper. Without paying the slightest attention to the imploring and begging, and threatening, "Nico! But, Nico! What are you doing? I forbid you. Do you hear, Nico!" she read aloud—

"Carlotta, I have waited in vain the whole afternoon for an apology or an explanation. Are you conspiring with that little wretch? It seems incredible, unbelievable. I consider you perfectly incapable of such ingratitude. Let me know what I'm to understand by the horrible scene. And take care the little wretch doesn't come in my sight again. Else I must avoid the house. Do you understand? Your

"HANS PR. D.

"P.S.—I was so rejoicing to see you again after so long an absence. And then, such a reception!

"H. PR. D.

"2nd P.S.—Is it Parisian impertinence? or arrogance on account of her success?

"H. PR. D."

Nicoline smiled and said, "I will answer papa."

Frau Flammert saw the uselessness of opposition, and gave in.

When she was dressed, Nicoline brought her this reply—

"PAPA,

"You must put up with me as mamma's secretary. If you won't read any further, you must do as you please. But I beg you to have patience.

"I have every right to be offended that you should speak of a horrible scene, when I modestly and respectfully reminded you that you had a daughter of whom you have no need to be ashamed. But I do not believe that those words express your real feeling. They are the result of the shock a man feels when suddenly disturbed in his comfortable habits. You will be sorry yourself when you have thought the matter over.

"Do you deny that I am your daughter? If you were capable of such an insult to my mother, I should utterly hate and despise you. If you do not deny it, then I have the right to call you father, and you have only yourself to reproach that you did not teach me to exercise that right as soon as I could speak.

"I am sorry to make myself unpleasant to you by this outspokenness. I cannot spare it you. You cannot have hoped that you would always escape. You must have said to yourself that I should not always be an ignorant child. I am now grown up, and you have to reckon with that. Every one learns sooner or later that he must bear the responsibility of his own deeds.

I am of royal blood. You know that better than I. I have the pride of my race, even with regard to you. I shall always act so that you must recognize 'Every inch my daughter!'

"When you come back—and you will come back, for my poor mother needs you sorely—you will always see me, so long at least as I live with my mother, and it can hardly annoy you to meet a dutiful daughter who has never withheld from her father the respect due to him. It must also satisfy your feelings of chivalry to find yourself at last in natural surroundings. I cannot believe for one moment that you can wish to act the stranger to me for ever, and thus have neither any ground nor any right to be a daily guest in our house. Your sole justification is that you are my father.

"I kiss your hand as in the days of my short frocks and long plaits, and, hoping for your kindness, am

"THE LITTLE WRETCH.

"P.S.—My conduct is the result of my clear sight and capable brain, and neither Paris nor my small success has anything to do with it.

"NICOLINE."

Frau Flammert wished to strike out or soften over some of the harsher expressions, but Nicoline would change nothing.

"And if you write without telling me, and spoil all that I'm taking so much trouble to do," she said, smiling, and with a threatening gesture, "I shall never forgive you."

"In short, you'll bring about a break. A severe judge has arisen in my own child, who condemns me for the past, and lays a heavy penance on me in the future." Again the tears rolled unrestrainedly down her cheeks.

"Do you feel it like that?" asked Nicoline, and took her mother in her arms.

She yielded to the petting like a little child in trouble.

"How can I feel it any other way? I may be very wicked, but it hurts me that you should tell me so."

Then Nicoline drew her mother down to her breast, and much moved, whispered—

"I wanted to keep it to myself. But you force me to tell it prematurely. You are completely in error, mummy. I neither reproach you nor judge you, and in my opinion you need not lower your head before any man. I want your unselfish faith to be rewarded. I wish—yes, mummy, I wish my father to marry you."

Frau Flammert pulled herself out of her daughter's embrace.

"Impossible!"

"Why impossible? My father is free. You will be so in a few weeks. I see no obstacle."

"I have never desired it of him."

"There you were wrong. You were always too

modest. You were not conscious of your worth and power. I must be so for you."

Frau Flammert slowly shook her head. "That's a fairy tale you've conceived in your romantic girl's mind."

"I romantic!" laughed Nicoline.

Frau Flammert continued without letting the interpolation put her out—

"You don't consider the fearful obstacles, the Grand Duke and the King of Frankwald, and the Princesses Adelheid and Hildegard—the prince would have too hard a battle to fight, even if he wished——"

"He must wish it, and he will wish it."

"And why disturb him, and why thrust him into strife and quarrel? I'm not keen for the honour of being the prince's wife. His faithful friendship satisfies me. The Pharisees are tired of throwing stones at me. Good men who understand a woman's heart have been witnesses of my life here for twenty years, in this nest where everybody knows what his neighbour has for dinner. They know that I have always been unselfish, and moved only by the sincerest feeling. They won't respect me more if the prince marries me. Perhaps less if I compel him by holding a knife at his throat. The prince has told me a thousand times that I am the happiness and sunshine of his life. Am I to become the torment of his old age?"

"Mummy, if you only pleaded for yourself half as eloquently as you plead against yourself, your cause would be already won."

"Ah, nonsense! And how do you mean to arrange the practical side? Are we to set up house together? I as the stepmother, you as the stepsister of the Princesses Adelheid and Hildegard. And I must leave the stage, renounce my art——"

"That's the only thing that troubles me. It is a heavy sacrifice. But you must make it. You can always sing in your own drawing-room, and all who hear you will be as grateful as they would be in the theatre; nay, more grateful. As to the princesses, we'll marry them. They're

none too young. And they are of good enough family not to want for suitors. Trust me to have thought it all out. Leave everything to me, my darling mother. We're living now in a new age. There the daughters marry their mother, and not the other way about, as formerly."

In spite of her depression, Frau Flammert smiled. "You imagine great things from this progress."

"Certainly I do."

"Now, I'll tell you, I shall not move a finger or speak a word to help you to realize your castle in the air."

"You needn't, mummy. I literally mean what I say, that I shall marry you. You've only got to let it happen."

"You really intend to go straight to the prince——

"Of course," said Nicoline, simply.

"But, child! Haven't you any feeling how horrible, how entirely brutal it is for a girl, a daughter, to discuss such subjects with her father?"

Nicoline smiled again. "I don't deny that there is a certain brutality in me. And I'll horrify you still more, my dearest; it's just the peculiarity that I most value in myself. It's inherited from my father."

Mother and daughter waited for the result of Nicoline's letter in an anxiety that in Frau Flammert became almost a fever. No sign came that day or the following from the shooting-box. Then, through skilful and seemingly aimless questioning of the tradespeople, they learnt that Prince Johann, after staying twenty-four hours at Walleroda, had suddenly taken his departure again.

Nothing authentic was heard of him for a long time. Only a well-meaning colleague of Frau Flammert was kind enough to retail in her letters all sorts of theatrical gossip—

"Here is something else that will interest you. Evil tongues say that Prince Johann objects to your daughter's engagement at the Court Theatre. It is scarcely conceivable. Is the director shielding himself behind his royal highness in order to justify himself for an unamiable

refusal? It would be just like him, but particularly tactless in this case."

Frau Flammert showed the letter to Nicoline without a word of comment. She read it and turned very red.

"I don't believe it," was her first remark. After thinking a little, she added, "It is just possible. Papa is evidently writhing to get rid of me. He hopes, perhaps, to drive me away from here so that you may be in his power again. Poor papa, he doesn't realize that I shall take you with me if I don't stay."

"That, too! A fresh surprise every day! What'll come next?"

"If necessary, you can begin a new life as an artist. You are at the zenith of your powers, and in full possession of your splendid voice. Grün can do for you what he's doing for me. And for mother and daughter to appear together would have a vast attraction for the public. You'll put me in the shade; but I'll permit that, mummy."

Meanwhile, the piece of gossip had not fallen on deaf ears. On their return from Paris, mother and daughter had spoken to the director about Nicoline's appearance, and had asked him to state his conditions for a six months' engagement. On her side Nicoline only asked that she should be allotted leading parts. The director desired a short time for consideration, and since then they had heard nothing from him. Nicoline now wanted to know where she was, so that in case of a refusal she might make other plans. After reading the Diesa singer's letter, she wrote to the director in order to remind him of his promise, and to request a definite answer.

The girl's letter caused the director great embarrassment, for the singer's gossip had a foundation of truth. Frau Flammert had informed the prince of everything; he knew that Nicoline was to sing at Diesa in the winter, and make her *début* in London in the spring, and immediately after her interview with the director, Frau Flammert had told Prince Johann of his answer.

The first sentences of Nicoline's letter threw the prince into a terrible rage; he thrust it from him, but soon

picked it up again and read it through half a dozen times. Its effect was to drive him at once from Wallesroda. He went to Kupferberg, where his daughters were staying with the Grand Ducal pair at their summer palace. The director was also accustomed to spend part of his holidays there. The prince was determined that the little rebel should feel his power. She must not imagine that she could simply do as she liked at Diesa. She should not sing at the theatre. He summoned the director, and asked him if he had definitely committed himself to engage Fräulein Flammert. He replied in the negative, and then the prince informed him that he did not wish her to appear first at Diesa. A failure would cause her mother great distress, and the Grand Ducal theatre had no interest in affording its chief star unpleasant experiences. So far, there was no satisfactory ground for counting on a success. The director bowed. He understood. But he was much perplexed. One the one hand, he did not dare to oppose the prince; on the other, he knew Frau Flammert's worth too well to risk offending her. Like a wise courtier, he determined to wait. He did not see his way clearly, and hoped for hints that might show it him. Then came Nicoline's letter, and he was obliged to take up some position. It struck him that, so far, the negotiations had been carried on by Nicoline, while her mother had been merely passive. Now, a mother might possibly not care to see her daughter her rival, and Frau Flammert might have made Prince Johann her mouthpiece. The director determined, after some delay, to ask Frau Flammert whether she perhaps preferred that her daughter should not be engaged. She could write to him privately; she knew he could keep silence, and he would then inform Fräulein Flammert of his decision.

When Frau Flammert received this letter from the director, she handed it to Nicoline, trembling with rage.

"What a set they are!" she exclaimed, while her mother hastened to her writing-table, and in her excitement wrote out this telegram—

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Neither of us will have anything more to do with Diesa."

But Nicoline prevented the despatch of the message, and a few hours later the following letter was sent:—

"DEAR BARON,

"You do not realize the effect that the supposition that I should intrigue against my own child is likely to have on me. I am sorry that you should think me capable of such an action. I have nothing to reply except to make use of Article VIII. of my contract, and if my daughter is not engaged for the winter season, to terminate my connection with the Grand Ducal Court Theatre on March 1st of next year. With kind remembrances,

"Yours obediently,

"CARLOTTA FLAMMERT."

The letter showed the director that he was on the wrong scent. Standing between the prince's wish, and the threat of his best singer, he saw no other solution than that of asking the Grand Duke's opinion.

For a hundred years Diesa had been regarded as a centre of art and culture. Flatterers called it the European metropolis of ideals, and the Grand Duke considered German intellectual life to be a province of his Grand Duchy. As he had neither an Academy nor an University, he gave all his attention and patronage to the theatre, and the slightest events in connection with it were treated as affairs of State.

The director made his report, and acknowledged his embarrassment. The Grand Duke asked on what ground Prince Johann interfered. The director replied that his royal highness seemed to think he was defending Frau Flammert's interests against those of her daughter, but that Frau Flammert herself took a different view. The Grand Duke said nothing for a while, and then let fall the words, "That's not nice of my brother."

That was sufficient. The director was now protected, and he wrote to Wallesroda that he engaged Fräulein Flammert for six months, from September 20th. He would allot to her all the parts that her mother might

wish her to represent, and she should sing them in turn with her. He could only offer her provisionally seventy-five marks remuneration for each performance, with a minimum sum of four hundred and fifty marks a month, but he hoped that her success during the period of probation would ensure her more brilliant conditions in the future.

At this juncture came the Baroness von Gronendal's death, the news of which the inhabitants of the villa learnt from the newspapers. Nicoline wrote at once to Siegfried, whose form suddenly rose vividly before her, and in her first rush of feeling it seemed to her that she must go to him and help him to bear his grief, and act the Ariadne in the labyrinth, knowing as she did his habitual helplessness. But the impulse soon died away. A conflict of duty arose in her mind, and she feared Siegfried's answer. It was a great relief that he did not take her at her word. Just then, too much rested on her shoulders, which, so far, had been free from burdens. She had to conduct the correspondence about the divorce with the lawyer, Dr. Leyding, to fight the battle with Prince Johann, to keep up her mother's courage through the storm, and to learn the parts from Wagner, Humperdinck, and Mascagni, in which she was first to appear. That was about as much as her nerves, strong as they were, could bear.

Prince Johann soon learned that, in spite of his wish, the director had engaged Nicoline, and he incurred, on that account, the prince's great displeasure. The Court official answered his remarks with the simple assertion—

"A personal command of our gracious master!"

The prince was incredulous, and asked his brother for direct information. He only obtained in reply—

"I can't understand why you wish to deprive our theatre of a young singer who made such a successful *début* in Paris. Or perhaps you don't want the girl to go on the stage at all?"

Prince Johann said nothing, and withdrew. At the first measuring of their strength Nicoline had proved the stronger. He was defeated.

He left Kupferberg and travelled. By that means he

hoped to learn to do without Frau Flammert. He went to Berlin, to Brussels, and to London, remaining only four or five days in each place. His listlessness and his unexpected visit created surprise at the courts at which he appeared. The press began to take notice of his movements. One very clever paper announced that the prince was fulfilling an important political mission. Other newspapers that also heard the grass grow, knew the purpose of his tour. It concerned the reconciliation of a dethroned royal family with their enemies. Nicoline smiled at these suggestions. She knew better. She never doubted that the prince sought distraction and oblivion. Intercourse with his equals at foreign courts would strengthen his resistance against his secret inclination to strike his flag before his indispensable friend and her daughter. She did not know why, but she felt very confident. Her mother was too precious, he could not let her go, and her father was at heart of too distinguished a character to remain long a party to an unworthy mode of conduct.

Frau Flammert's eyes grew very red, she looked as if she did not sleep, and since the contract with the director had been signed, she avoided speaking of the prince. She contented herself with eagerly searching the newspapers for information about his movements. Thus passed three weeks. Then, all of a sudden, one afternoon, a telegram arrived at the villa, containing only the words—

"Had never believed such ingratitude possible. Find it more and more incomprehensible."

It was not signed, and came from Windsor.

"He's giving in, mummy," said Nicoline, joyfully, as soon as she had read it.

"What shall I reply?" asked Frau Flammert, with a deep sigh.

"Nothing at all. Keep still as a mouse until he yields entirely."

Two days later came another telegram with the answer prepaid—

"Will never forgive such conduct. Is anything wrong with you?"

Nicoline answered at once—

"Yes.—CARLOTTA."

When the telegram had gone, she said to her mother, "Now you may expect a visit from him at any moment."

A few anxious days of waiting followed, during which Nicoline asked herself if she had read her father's mind aright. The tension was broken when the gillie appeared at the villa with a letter. The prince wrote—

"BAD, UNGRATEFUL WOMAN!

"This can't go on. Tell me where and when I can see you. I've only been here half an hour; tired, wretched. It would be best if you came up here to me.

"HANS PR. D.

"P.S.—Such things are a disgrace after two and twenty years. "HANS."

No further speech was needed between mother and daughter. The correspondence was in Nicoline's hand, and Frau Flammert did not seek to interfere. The man took back the following answer:—

"DEAR PAPA,

"Mamma is delighted at your return. We both hope to see you here very soon. So far as we are concerned, you will be made as comfortable here as you used to be.

"Your dutiful daughter,

"NICOLINE."

Frau Flammert was allowed to add in her own hand: "Lots of kisses from your Carlotta."

An uneasy stillness prevailed during this day and the following. At afternoon tea, Frau Flammert asked—

"Weren't we too hard."

"Not in the least, mummy. Only hold out. You'll see." But her heart beat somewhat quickly.

The evening had drawn in, and a fine rain was falling.

September had come in coldly, and a small wood fire was a necessity in the white-tiled stove in the drawing-room. The door-bell rang, not once and loudly, but twice; the first time hesitatingly and softly, the second more loudly. That was not the prince's usual way. But all the same, mother and daughter got up and listened, holding their breath. A few minutes later the maid opened the door and the prince entered. He looked tired, and his beard was whiter. Frau Flammert went to meet him with outstretched hand. He threw a shy side-look at Nicoline's blushing face and curtseying figure, and bent over her mother's hand.

"At last!" exclaimed Frau Flammert.

"Yes," growled the prince, and sat down in a corner of the sofa.

"You'll stay to supper?"

"If I'm allowed," he muttered, and again looked at Nicoline.

She made an effort to regain her composure, and remain mistress of the situation. She came nearer, raised her head, and, looking the prince full in the face, said—

"Father, why do you hate me?"

"Stuff and nonsense. What put that into your silly head?"

"But I must think so. Else why did you think it improper for me to call you 'papa'?"

"Ah! well!—you used not to do it." He stroked his moustache nervously, and avoided looking Nicoline in the face.

"Unfortunately not. But it had to be some time. I'm no longer a child. I know and understand."

"Bad enough," he growled.

"But it's worse to act a comedy that deceives no one, and to live a lie that lowers us all."

"No one has ever dared to speak to me like that," roared the prince.

"That's the misfortune of kings and their like. You only know the historical modes of speech. You have duties in this house. You have never been reminded of

them. But you can't neglect them any longer," declared Nicoline.

"Oh! And how do you make that out?" He turned to the silent Frau Flammert, who had seated herself in an armchair near the sofa.

Nicoline put her arm protectingly round her mother. "It means that you must conclude one period of your life, and begin a new one. You were ready to commit an unheard of wrong in separating yourself from my mother."

"You forget to whom you are speaking," exclaimed the prince, his voice trembling with anger.

The more excited the prince became, the calmer grew Nicoline.

"I am of your blood, father," she said, with provoking gentleness. "I'll have none of your royal highnesses. It disgraces me. Now listen quietly. You went away with the intention of not returning. You have discovered that you can't so easily break a bond that is twenty years old. We must draw a lesson from the episode. The bond must be strengthened, so that it may be protected from sudden caprices. Your child asks, what your wife before God and your conscience has never asked: you must marry mamma."

"Have you all gone mad?" shouted the prince, getting up off the sofa, and walking towards the door.

With a bound Nicoline reached it first. "Sit down, father," she said, with a firmness that overpowered the prince. "Don't run away. You'd only have to come back again, and that would humiliate you. Spare yourself and us that. You can't live without mamma. If you don't know it, I tell you it is so. So make everything straight. You owe it to your self-respect, even if not to respect for my mother and your children—all your children. Give my mother at last the place that belongs to her."

"Ah! into what lunatic asylum have I come?" shouted the prince, gnashing his teeth. "You're a married woman——"

"Not any more," returned Nicoline, calmly. "The divorce proceedings are going on, and will be finished in a few weeks."

"Ah! You've done that?" turning in amazement to Frau Flammert. "Behind my back?"

"Nicoline would have it," murmured Frau Flammert, apologetically.

"Yes," affirmed Nicoline, "and I also wish you to marry mamma."

"Go away," ordered the prince, his energy flaming up again, "and leave us alone."

Nicoline shook her fair head. "No, father, I'm at home, and you've no right to turn me out of my own drawing-room. You will only have that right when you are master here as my mother's husband."

"That is impertinence—vulgar mutiny!"

"You are mistaken, father. Not vulgar mutiny, but loyal assertion of our rights. I am of noble birth."

He was crushed and prostrated. "Hoped to spend a pleasant hour," he muttered gloomily, "after so much worry and vexation. Instead of that this most unseemly scene."

"I beg your pardon, papa. On the contrary, what we desire is your future peace and comfort. Don't you feel it?"

He did not seem to hear the remark. "There's the thanks for my faithfulness," he murmured, as if to himself.

That brought another electrical outburst from Nicoline. "It is you who have to thank my mother for her faithfulness, and not the other way round. She has sacrificed her life, her reputation, the millions of golden coins that lay in her throat, to you. Her love was so strong that no sacrifice my mother brought you was too heavy for her. What have you given her in return? I am all she has of you."

"But once more," exclaimed the prince angrily, turning to Frau Flammert, "I speak to you and not to her."

"You forget that you are not only my father, but also a nobleman, and that you are speaking to a girl."

Reply and counter-reply clashed like hurtling daggers.

"Nicoline," said Frau Flammert, in deep emotion, "you go too far. Your father's love has brought me happiness. The aim of my artistic efforts was to deserve

his praise. That I should make sacrifices for him, and desire none in return, raises me in my eyes."

Her tone found the way to the prince's heart. He seized her hand, and said, in a voice to which he could give no firmness—

"Ah! that's like you always were. Trust to me. Thank you, Carlotta; thank you."

A pause ensued, which worked with gentle influence on them all. The prince was the first to break it.

"You can't wish impossibilities. You know the question has never entered our minds; never can enter them—never, never."

"Don't be angry, Hänsel, but that isn't quite true," replied Frau Flammert, lifting up her head. Something impelled her not to leave her daughter under the impression of the prince's assurance.

"It is so long ago—you may well have forgotten it—everything stands as clearly before my eyes as if it had only happened an hour ago. It was after my second appearance, as 'Elizabeth.' You sent me the diamond necklace—you know. I refused it, and told you that a prince might only offer me flowers and bonbons. Then you came yourself, and spoke intoxicating words to the singer, and when you saw my confusion, you suddenly grasped my hand, and said, in a trembling voice, 'I lay my heart at your feet.' I answered, 'I dare not pick it up,' and escaped. And then you came again, and persuaded me when I refused you, and knelt down before me——"

"Yes, yes," murmured the prince.

"And knelt before me and wept——"

"Ah! what do you mean? Childish!"

"And wept and said, "Fräulein Carlotta, don't be hard, don't be cruel. If I were free, I should ask you to be my wife. A crown would hardly adorn you, but you would adorn any crown.' Is that true, Hänsel?"

"Yes, certainly; but I mean——"

"And when you persuaded me to marry for the sake of appearances, did you not say, 'He is not marrying you, I am marrying you by proxy.' And your first letters,

do you know how they addressed me? And who wished Nicoline to be called after your grandfather? And who always longed for his little princess, while she was a babe?"

The prince rocked himself backwards and forwards in his sofa corner, and tugged at his cravat.

"It's warm here—too warm."

Nicoline flew to the window and opened it a little. "Is that better, papa?"

"Thank you, Nicoline," he said, half sulkily, half genially.

She came back, and with an imploring look, spoke softly, emphatically, affectionately.

"See, father, you are now just what mamma has always known and loved. Why do you pretend to be a cruel tyrant? Let your heart speak, and obey its promptings. Then you'll do the right thing."

The prince's face worked strangely. He tried to avoid his daughter's glance. He cleared his throat, looked at his watch, and got up. Frau Flammert hastened to the door.

"We'll go in to supper," she said, and took the prince's arm. He allowed himself to be led into the dining-room, and he sat down in his usual place.

He ate and drank in silence. Neither of the women spoke. He was thinking too deeply for them to wish to disturb him. When the roast meat came on, he began to speak again.

"Too difficult. Well-nigh impossible."

"Neither impossible nor difficult, father, if you are only determined."

"My daughters——"

"We'll marry them. That won't be unpleasant to them."

"My brother—my brother-in-law——"

"You're independent, papa."

"You don't understand anything about it. Carlotta, leave everything as it is. We are married. Shall soon celebrate our silver wedding. What do people matter?"

"Yes."

Nicoline felt her mother become weak and yielding at this exhortation. She went hastily to her support.

"No, father, you mustn't appease your conscience with comfortably sounding phrases. People do matter. If you feel yourself married, you can't dislike the notion of being really so."

"Perhaps, you've got the priest and the registrar waiting?" asked the prince, scornfully.

"There is no such hurry," returned Nicoline, calmly. "We shall neither surprise nor force you into it. You shall decide of your own free will, and carry it out after reflection."

"Of my own free will is very pretty," growled the prince. But he ate with a better appetite than at the beginning of the meal.

After a brief pause, he took up the thread again, speaking more to himself than to his companions.

"And the question of rank—my brother, my brother-in-law won't have it. Can't beg a title from foreign princes, can I?"

"That's the least difficulty," said Frau Flammert. "I set no store by a title. I don't want one. Carlotta Scholz, if that suits you, Hänsel, well, it suits me."

A slight shadow flitted over Nicoline's face. "Mummy, you mustn't be too modest, Carlotta Scholz is certainly better than Carlotta Flammert. But you must take care that everybody adds, 'Wife of his Royal Highness Prince Johann, of Meissen-Diesa-Kupferberg.'"

"Ah! you mean to be a princess?"

"I am that anyway, papa. I've no wish to use the title. I shall create a title for myself. I only desire that the marriage shall not be concealed. Any other rise in rank except the marriage is unnecessary. If I had brothers, I would not suffer a morganatic marriage. I'll have no strangers in the family. But, since I have no brothers, and am not likely to have any——"

Frau Flammert blushed like a girl at the unconcerned tone in which the words were spoken, and the prince stared at the speaker openmouthed. This was quite a new species of humanity that was being revealed to him.

"Do you smoke?" he asked.

"Yes, papa," Nicoline replied without wincing.

"A pipe?"

"Not yet."

The prince smiled for the first time that evening. "Do you hunt?"

"You haven't taught me, papa. But mamma has taught me to sing."

"Glibness of speech leaves nothing to be desired."

He became deep in thought, his cheerfulness vanished, and he looked worried again.

"And your singing. After a public marriage, my wife can scarcely let herself be stared at by the gallery."

"Mamma must make you that sacrifice," observed Nicoline, quickly. "She must give up the stage, difficult as she will find it."

"But you?"

"I? No, papa; I shall not forego my career. But it won't disturb you. For I shall take an assumed name, and work abroad."

He gave up the contest. He was beaten.

Immediately after supper the prince took his departure. The scene had exhausted all three of them, and they felt the need of rest. In the hall, he kissed Frau Flammert on the brow, looked for a moment in silence at Nicoline, who was standing by her, and then, with a sudden movement, gave her his hand. She was crimson, tears started to her eyes, and she kissed it affectionately. Then the prince put his left arm round her, drew her to his breast, kissed her fair head, and with long strides went out into the darkness.

The fortnight that followed this fateful evening, was, Frau Flammert acknowledged, the happiest of her life. She dreamed, and feared, and was glad, like a girl just engaged, and to any other eyes than Nicoline's, she might have appeared somewhat ridiculous. The handsome woman of forty was rejuvenated by half her age, and seemed to be her daughter's elder sister by a few years. The prince spent almost the whole day with them, with Nicoline too, of whom he grew very fond, although, or

perhaps because, she impressed him more and more. They made driving and walking excursions together, and in the evening, mother and daughter sang scenes and songs from operas to the music-loving prince with such glorious voices and perfect art, that he entirely forgot the world. When there was a full moon, they went late in the evening to the neighbouring valley, which was celebrated for its birds, and woke with their singing the hundreds and thousands of birds of passage, who paused there on their way south, till all the trees and bushes, the reeds on the bank, and the boulders on the hillside rang with sound.

At the beginning of the autumn they had to go back to Diesa. The prince had promised to consider the subject of his daughters' marriages. The new season began at the theatre. Nicoline was to appear at the commencement of October. The rehearsals began at the end of September. Frau Flammert had given up to her the part of "Elizabeth" in *Tannhäuser*, in which she herself had made her greatest success, and had sung only a few weeks ago. Gossip flew round the town that something extraordinary was to be expected, that such a voice had not been heard in Germany within the memory of man, or such a temperament seen on the stage. Everything tended to make the performance an event that roused the greatest expectation; the comparison of the daughter with the mother, the young artist's birth naturally known to every child in Diesa, the reputation she had gained in Paris, the reports of the members of the orchestra and others employed in the theatre, and also the curious name, Aseid, under which she was announced to sing, had something to say in the matter.

Five days before the performance, all the reserved places were sold. On the evening itself more than a thousand persons who sought admission to the unreserved parts of the house, were turned away. The Grand Duke and Duchess occupied the royal box; Prince Johann, with the Princesses Adelheid and Hildegard, was in his. All the members of the Court were present. Frau Flammert was behind the scenes, and only moved from Nicoline's side

when she was actually on the stage. The girl was marvellously calm—more like a veteran than a novice. The other singers had never seen anything like it.

When she first appeared on the stage, a sudden stir went through the theatre. The spectators saw before them to the life the former Grand Duchess, whose portrait as a young woman hung in every loyal citizen's parlour, and of whose masculine determination, pride, benevolence, and strange ideas there were a thousand tales. The likeness was so striking that the Grand Duke exclaimed, half aloud—

"Incredible! Is it nature, or art?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Grand Duchess.

"Nothing, nothing," he replied, but could not take his eyes off the artist the whole evening, for his mother was before him as he had known her as a boy.

The audience felt throughout the performance that it was not an artist acting a part, but a real princess living her life before them in joy and sorrow, in pride and maidenly humility. And then the voice, powerful as a big silver bell in its full tones, warm, sweet, light as that of a trilling nightingale—indeed, there was nothing with which to compare it. It was not applause that she received. Despite the presence of the Grand Duke and Duchess, it was a shrieking, a shouting, a mad clapping and stamping and roaring, as if overpowering feelings must find vent in wild relief before they could become calm again. They had not finished calling her before the curtain when it fell for the last time, the footlights were extinguished, and gradually all became still.

Nicoline lay in her mother's arms. Frau Flammert was weeping with joy. Round them stood Tannhäuser, Wolfram, the Landgraf, the conductor of the orchestra, all respectfully tendering their congratulations, when the director hurriedly came up, and, offering her his arm, said—

"You are to be presented to their royal highnesses. Come at once, Fräulein."

"What! in costume?" interposed her mother.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed the director; and took Nicoline away.

A moment later she was in the brilliantly lighted room with its blue silk hangings that lay behind the royal box. The director remained respectfully near the door. The Grand Duchess sat in an armchair between two of her ladies-in-waiting. The Grand Duke, whose adjutant stood by him, went quickly forward, gave Nicoline his hand, and said—

"I congratulate you, Fräulein—heartily congratulate you. It was an inimitable *début*."

Nicoline made a low curtsey, first to the Grand Duchess, then to the Grand Duke.

"Very good of you, your royal highness."

"But tell me, my dear child, how did you come to choose your Arabic stage-name?"

"Arabic? It's not Arabic, your royal highness."

"Aseid? Not Arabic! What is it, then?"

"Hasn't your royal highness guessed?"

"Must confess—no. Help me, Fräulein."

"Your royal highness has only to read the name backwards."

The Grand Duke started, spelt it in his mind, and broke out—

"Diesa! Oh, an allusion to your native town?"

"If your royal highness likes to understand it so——"

It was time for the Grand Duchess to join in the conversation.

"I have to thank you for a pleasant evening, my dear young lady," she said. "And what specially pleases me is the continuance of our traditions, which is assured by your appearance. We admired your mother, the new generation will admire you. Isn't such an inheritance to be prized?"

"Certainly, your royal highness. I also treasure inheritances, all inheritances." Nicoline laid such stress on the "all," that those present exchanged glances.

The Grand Duchess dismissed Nicoline with a bow, the Grand Duke with a shake of the hand. When she was gone, the Grand Duchess asked her husband—

"Are those Parisian manners?"

The Grand Duke so far forgot himself as to shrug his shoulders slightly.

"The young lady decidedly betrays race," was his reply.

On leaving the theatre with her mother, Nicoline had a little surprise. As usual, a crowd of gaping sightseers had gathered round the stage-door. A man separated himself from it, approached the ladies with rapid steps, and exclaimed in bad French—

"Long live the triumphant. You have exceeded all my hopes, mademoiselle. You are a great artist."

With a little shriek, Nicoline said, "You here, Mr. Grün?"

"You did not seriously imagine I should not come to-night. May I walk with you?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Grün."

"Too much depended on it for me. But I am no longer anxious, if I ever was so really. Do you know, mademoiselle, what the head-waiter of my hotel had to pay for the very poor seat he secured for me at the last moment? A hundred marks! In Diesa! Well, people shall often pay a hundred marks to hear you. And what manners and customs you've got here! Your Court theatre officials are more inaccessible than our president. They wouldn't hear of my going behind the scenes to see you, although I revealed myself in all my greatness."

Nicoline smiled. "Why didn't you send your card to me?"

"S-sh! You mustn't talk out-of-doors on an October night. Keep your mouth tightly shut, and let me do the talking."

"I haven't sung," said Frau Flammert, "so I may talk. When did you arrive, Mr. Grün?"

"Yesterday afternoon, madam."

"And you didn't come to us at once?"

"Oh no. I wanted to go to the theatre incognito in the midst of the public, so as to hear people's real opinion. Magnificent, madam, magnificent. Be kind and good, mademoiselle. Let us make an agreement for a longer time. Two years pass so quickly, and I'm ready——"

"No, Mr. Grün," began Nicoline.

"S-sh! You mustn't talk. Your mother will answer for you."

"This is scarcely the time and place——"

"Prejudice, my dear madam, prejudice of slow, backward folk. Good business can be done anywhere and everywhere. Make up your minds, ladies. It must be a good thing for you to have the future as well assured as I can make it for you. Of course, the future is in God's hands, and if it can be enjoyed in the present, I think——"

"How long are you staying here, Mr. Grün?" asked Nicoline.

"I'm going off to-morrow morning. I've to make preparations for my London season. But I'll willingly stay here until you sign my new contract."

"So long——"

"S-sh! Mademoiselle, you really mustn't."

"Ah! let that alone. I'm made of iron. I never take cold. No, dear Mr. Grün, you can't stay here so long as that. For under no circumstances will I sign a new contract this year."

"But——"

"Don't press me, Mr. Grün. It's of no use. But you may rest assured that no success can cause me to forget how pleasant it was that you swept all difficulties aside for me in the beginning. We are faithful and grateful people, aren't we, mummy?"

Her mother drew her closer to her side. They had reached their house. The impresario hesitated a little, but as they did not ask him to go in, he took leave of them at the door.

They had not long sat down to supper when the door opened, and Prince Johann came in. Both flew to meet him. He put his arms round Nicoline, and said, in a voice full of emotion—

"I was proud of you, Nico."

He sat down between them, and apologized for not going to them, either in the theatre or after the performance; he had to take leave of his brother, and see his

daughters home, so that he could not get to them until now.

He was silent for a while. When supper was over, he suddenly took a rather large blue velvet case, with a gold catch, out of his pocket. He put it in front of Frau Flammert, pressed the snap, and a splendid diamond necklace came into view.

Frau Flammert uttered a cry, "Hänsel, that is——"

The prince nodded. "Yes, it's the same. You refused it then. You were right. Now you may take it. Meant to wait till the silver wedding. Would rather you had it to-day. You'll inherit it, Nico. Not for a long while, I hope. I had it from my mother, of whom you are a perfect likeness."

Nicoline fastened the jewels round her mother's beautiful neck while tears rolled down her flaming cheeks. She seized her father's hand, kissed it, and said—

"A thousand, thousand thanks, father. Now I recognize you as your old self. You have made me a royal gift. You could not have pleased me more."

The next day, as early as good manners permitted, the director went to see Flau Flammert, greeted Fräulein Nicoline, and assiduously asked after her health, handed her the five Diesa morning papers in case she had not yet seen them, and said—

"My dear young lady, after yesterday's success we may regard the probation period as at an end. I am glad to be able now to agree to a final contract. I have put down the chief points. You must appear twelve times a month. Every year you will have three months' holiday, from May 1st to November 1st. You will receive——"—here he paused, and spoke his next sentences in as solemn a tone as if they contained a revelation—"eighteen thousand marks salary, and fifty marks remuneration for each performance."

He looked up to observe the effect. He was astonished to see Nicoline and Frau Flammert merely exchange a swift, amused glance.

"You see that we are offering you the salary your

mother had only after she had worked for ten years. You certainly cannot expect nor wish to receive more than so distinguished an artist as your mother. We should like to know your wishes regarding the length of the engagement, and the notice for terminating it."

Nicoline smiled at the director, and said nothing.

"Well, Fräulein Flammert?" he asked, after a little while, feeling surprised and uncertain.

"I am very much obliged to you, baron, but the six months' contract already made is sufficient."

"You are not serious?" exclaimed the director.

"I should never allow myself to jest with you."

"But can it be possible? A brilliant engagement like this offered to a mere beginner. Are your wishes more ambitious?"

"No, baron; I only wish not to bind myself for a time."

"I purposely refrained from telling you that yesterday during the first *entr'acte* his Royal Highness emphatically expressed the wish that we should secure your talent for our theatre. You know what that means. Before two years are past, you have the title of a Grand Ducal Chamber singer."

"I shall try in the next six months to please the Grand Duke."

"By accepting the contract?"

"By singing as well I can."

The director shook his head, and in great annoyance took his departure.

It was soon known in the castle, the theatre, and the town, that Nicoline had refused a splendid contract, at any rate for Diesa, without explanation, and everybody was greatly puzzled as to what was behind such arrogant conduct, something fixed, or merely self-sufficient mystery. Her fellow-citizens did not cease to occupy themselves with her the whole winter and spring, but chiefly in legitimate fashion. Each performance was a new artistic revelation, and a fresh triumph. Each representation became a kind of festival. Special trains were run from places in the surrounding district, and invitations to sing

at other theatres, and proposals for engagements, which she had of course to refuse, poured in.

Then no beginner ever had such press notices. The local papers and those of neighbouring towns expressed their admiration so emphatically that the notice of the whole press of Germany was attracted, and it occupied itself with the new star. Mr. Grün took care that the French, English, and American press should do the same. He managed so that the important illustrated papers published Nicoline's portrait, and that it was displayed in booksellers' and art dealers' shop-windows in all the capitals of the world. Interviewers came to Diesa at his expense, and sent long articles to London and New York, describing a small German town, which was the seat of a Court, a German artist's home, the conditions of a German Court theatre, personal anecdotes of mother and daughter, and snapshots which illustrated the chief of the descriptions. Mr. Grün was laying the foundations of his star according to the most approved American financial rules, and effected that Nicoline's reputation reached a high premium before it was put on the market.

This part of their impresario's work was secretly disliked by Nicoline and her mother, but it was not possible to prevent it. It was the custom of the age, and necessary as preparation for the success that she must achieve if Mr. Grün was to recoup himself for his great speculation.

She was specially moved to find in the papers which so extravagantly described her first appearance, the Vienna reporter's interview with Siegfried, and the mysterious story of his expulsion from Austria. He was also bestirring himself; he was making efforts! It did not matter that the campaign opened with a defeat. The essential thing was the battle. That he should not write to her about his plans and doings seemed to her very considerate on his part. He adhered to the treaty: each was to strive for his goal, and was only to approach the other when it was attained. That was right and manly. And one day he would acknowledge that she knew how to appreciate his conduct.

At the end of October an event occurred which had the effect of a bomb. One evening the bills announced a performance of *Traviata*: "Violetta"—Frau Carlotta Scholz; and the next morning the journalists wrote that the public must be vastly surprised to see an unknown Frau Scholz announced for one of the favourite parts of Frau Flammert, but that the riddle was soon solved, since Frau Scholz and Frau Flammert were one and the same person. She had again assumed her maiden name, long forgotten by the public, because she had quietly been divorced from her husband, who lived at Märwurt.

Prince Johann had never concealed his relations to her. He did so now less than ever. The people were not fools; they saw a connection between the divorce and the fact that the prince dined every day with the singer, and began to hint that a marriage was in view. The rumour soon reached the highest quarters, and was at first treated as idle gossip. It was only regarded seriously when an unwonted and surprising energy was observed in Prince Johann, in regard to seeking husbands for his daughters.

In the case of the Princess Adelheid there was little difficulty. Her uncle, the King of Frankenwald, was childless, and his cousin, the heir to the throne, was an old bachelor, so that it was highly improbable that there would be an heir in that quarter. Therefore, the crown would devolve on the Princess Adelheid and her descendants, so that she was a desirable match. Several princes visited Diesa in the course of the autumn, and in January the engagement of the Princess Adelheid to a royal prince, attractive in person, and of pleasing manners, was officially announced. The wedding took place six weeks later, at Carnival time. Among the gaieties to which it gave rise was a gala performance at the opera, and a concert at Court. Frau Scholz and Nicoline assisted at both. Prince Johann begged them not to refuse on account of the gossip; they did not let him finish. They did not feel like inferiors on such an occasion, but as near relatives who gladly helped to make such a period pleasant for their step-daughter and step-sister.

It was less easy with the Princess Hildegard. She stood

farther from the throne of Frankenwald than her elder sister. She was neither rich, nor beautiful, nor brilliant, nor in good health. None of the princely visitors developed into suitors; by Easter they had all passed her in review, and it was acknowledged at Court that there was nothing to do but to await some fortunate chance.

But Nicoline would wait no longer, and desired, amiably and calmly, yet decidedly, that Prince Johann should redeem his promise. The moment had come. He must speak to his brother.

The Grand Duke was not surprised. "If you can't leave it alone, for God's sake, do it," was his answer.

Deeply moved, Prince Johann sought to kiss his hand.

He would not have it, but added, with a smile, "You need not thank me. If children were likely, that would complicate the matter. But that is out of the question, so that there's nothing to discuss. It's a pity that it must disorganize my opera, for, naturally, the two ladies cannot remain on the stage. To lose two such magnificent artists at one time is hard; but since it's necessary to your happiness——"

The Grand Duke inquired how his brother intended to arrange his life in the future, and received the answer, that he had hardly yet thought about it..

"And what title shall we bestow on your bride?"

"Thank you very much for your kindness," replied Prince Johann, quickly, "but it's needless. Carlotta makes no claims in that direction."

The Grand Duke shook his head. "Impossible, if we are to see each other. How am I to address her? As Carlotta? Too familiar. As Frau Scholz? Not to be thought of. There remains only, my dear baroness. That's all right."

"Well, if you insist——"

"Do you know what, Hans? Let's dub her Baroness von Aseid. It was so bold a stroke on the part of that nice girl, that the idea deserves to be permanently recorded."

Having won the Grand Duke's approval, the prince

found it easier to tell the Grand Duchess of his determination. His sister-in-law pretended only to recognize outward, correct facts.

"Frau Scholz is a divorced woman," she said coldly and with dignity, "and, as a rule, I don't like divorces. But I know that others think differently. Besides, I am told the verdict was against the husband, so Frau Scholz deserves no blame. Personally, I like her very much, and I set her very high as an artist, and her daughter too. I wish you every happiness."

Now he had to make things right with Princess Hildegard. That was the most difficult. He asked her to come to him in the smoking-room. They sat opposite each other, and he said, stuttering, and speaking with more difficulty than usual—

"Well, Hildegard, you're no longer a child. You'll understand me. Your poor mother—dead. Adelheid—married. You, too, I expect very soon. Well, I shall be alone. Hard to bear. Am no longer young. And so, and so—can't help it. You'll understand—must marry again."

The princess turned very red, and then became paler than usual. She cast down her eyes, and said in her weak voice—

"I quite understand, papa. Frau Flammert has well deserved it."

He started as if he had been shot. "Frau Scholz," he stammered—"Frau Scholz. But how do you know? Has any one told you already?"

"But my dear papa!" was all that she replied, with a melancholy, reproachful smile.

"Stepmother—always such things. Would have gladly spared you. It'll cease when you marry—and if you prefer it, you can go to your uncle at Märwurt."

"Do you want me out of the house?" she asked sadly.

"No, oh no!" he said at once. "I only mean—living together might be difficult—on account of the difference in rank."

"That need not trouble you, papa. I shall meet

your wife quite easily. I am grateful to her that she is so much to you. And"—she spoke more softly, and her voice trembled—"you will be glad to know that mamma had no prejudice against her. On the contrary."

Something rose in his throat, and made breathing difficult. He cleared his throat loudly, in order to get rid of the obstruction. A distant voice sounded from the grave, in order to absolve him. But the absolution was itself a verdict.

When he had regained his composure, he asked, "There's still another thing; how shall your—my—Frau Scholz address you?"

"Doesn't she know that my name is Hildegard?" asked the princess, simply.

Her father embraced her. "You're an angel, Hildegard."

As far back as she could remember, the poor, unattractive creature had never received a caress from her father. How she would have liked to have remained a little while warmly folded in his arms! But the happy moment did not last. The prince set her free, and got up to go.

The prince told Frau Scholz briefly, but with visible emotion, of the satisfactory way in which he had spent his morning. Despite her efforts at self-control, she burst into tears, and Nicoline alternately kissed her father's hand and her mother's face. She was particularly delighted that her mother should be called Baroness von Aseid.

"See, mummy," she whispered, between the kisses, "I've not only married you, but also given you a name. The thing could not have been done more perfectly."

The prince suggested to his *future*, who was also his past and his present, that he should introduce her at once to the Princess Hildegard.

Nicoline clapped her hands. "Yes, mummy, go! Go at once! And be just as nice to her as you know how!"

"Won't you come too?" said the prince.

She hesitated, turned crimson, was silent for a while, and then said softly—

"Thank you, papa. But, you know—I'm sensitive—you understand!"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the prince, crossly, in order to hide the slight trembling of his voice. "Hildegard is sensible and kind. There's nothing to fear."

Thanks to the tact and naturalness of the Princess Hildegard, the first meeting went much more pleasantly than those who took part in it had imagined possible. Prince Johann took his *fiancée* and his daughter into the library, sent for Princess Hildegard, and, as she entered, said—

"I want to introduce my future wife and her daughter."

Both got up and bowed in silence. The princess gave her hand to Frau Scholz, and asked softly—

"May I call you mother?"

Frau Scholz looked at her, and, with sudden emotion, put her arms round her.

"My good, dear princess?"

"You must call me daughter, will you, mother?"

Frau Scholz nodded, and her tears fell on the princess's scanty brown hair.

Hildegard then turned to Nicoline, who, filled with deep emotion, stood beside her mother.

"Welcome to the house of your father, my beautiful sister," she said.

Nicoline, who was a head taller than the sickly, plain girl, bent down and kissed her. Then the princess put her arms round her neck, and said passionately

"Oh, how glad I am! How I have longed for this moment! How I have always admired you! Your beauty, your regal stature, your splendid voice! Only admired, believe me, never envied!"

Nicoline then asked the princess to take her to her apartments, and there the sisters spent a happy half-hour. The two girls talked freely and unrestrainedly about all that lay closest to their hearts. It was hard for Hildegard to part with her sister when it was time for her to go.

Until the wedding, they spent almost the whole of every day together. Through the kindness of the Grand

Duke, all formalities were shortened and simplified. The director cancelled the contract of his chief singer. The publication of banns was dispensed with. The office which dealt with such things had quickly prepared the patent of nobility for the *fiancée* who was so well received by the Court. One sunny morning the marriage was quietly celebrated in the chapel of the castle, after the Minister of the Interior had conducted the civil ceremony. The Grand Duke and his heir were present; the Grand Duchess was represented by her first lady-in-waiting. The couple drove from the chapel to the railway-station, whence they set out for a tour in Italy, to be extended even to Palermo. Hildegard and Nicoline were in the Court waiting-room. The parting of mother and daughter was long and painful. The prince had taken it for granted that Nicoline would give up the stage, but she had declared that she had no intention of so doing. While her mother was in Italy, she had to fulfil her London engagement.

"I can't imagine it!" complained her mother. "When I come back, I shan't find you here—and you'll be quite alone in a strange land, and be living so far from me."

"Mummy, such is life. I must. We must. I've won my first campaign. Now I undertake my second. By myself alone. After the first battle, when I've conquered, you may come and see me in London."

"Ah, that would be splendid!" exclaimed the Princess Hildegard. "May I come too?"

"Dearest Hildegard!" said Nicoline, and kissed her on the brow.

When their parents were gone, Hildegard wanted Nicoline to go and live with her at the palace; but she refused. She would be leaving Diesa in a few days, and, until then, the preparations for her journey would wholly occupy her. Mr. Grün had arrived in Diesa soon after Easter, and she found his help invaluable. Before she left, she was able to procure for him the Diesa medal for art and science, and the order of merit; and to take with her to Paris, for Signor Conti, her singing mistress's husband, the cross of a commander of the Grand Ducal

house. She was to go first to Paris, with a suite of a lady companion, a lady accompanist, and a maid.

They put up at Paris, by Mr. Grün's desire, at one of the best hotels. The papers announced her arrival in the society news. Signora Conti, to whom she went first, received her like a princess, and gave a "send-off" dinner in her honour, to which ambassadors, envoys, a minister, and several great ladies were invited.

The first thing that Nicoline did after taking possession of her rooms at the hotel, was to write to Siegfried, giving him her address, and saying—

"DEAR SIEGFRIED,

"I have been just an hour in Paris, and am staying three or four days. I shall be glad to see you again. I have much to tell you. And you? I am on the road to success. And you?

"Your unchanged

"NICOLINE."

The first day she awaited his coming with impatience and a certain excitement, the next day with surprise and annoyance. But he did not come. On the fourth day, the post brought her letter back with the legend, "Not known. Gone away, leaving no address. Return to sender."

Before this, little Coppée, who had learnt her arrival from the newspapers, had been to see her in order to get material for a long article in the *Vercingetorix* about her Diesa performances, her London plans, her mother's marriage, and the Grand Ducal Court; and, in return, he had told her the latest gossip about the people she had formerly known in Paris. She waited until he should mention Siegfried, but he thought it better to avoid doing so. Then she asked straight out—

"Do you still see Prince Siegfried?"

An ironical smile played round the young man's mouth.

"Prince Siegfried? No, mademoiselle; I have not seen him since he left Paris."

"What! isn't he here?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle," replied Coppée.

"Where is he, then?"

"I don't know exactly. People say all sorts of things; but it's such nonsense, it's not worth repeating."

"But if I ask you to?" she said.

"Well, then, yes. Some say he has gone to America, in order to catch a rich heiress; others, that he has allied himself with foreign political adventurers, and is playing the part of a revolutionary chief, a claimant to the throne or something of the sort, in a piratical state."

At the first words Nicoline turned suddenly pale, at the following she regained her colour.

The prince is evidently slandered," she murmured.

"That's always the case when people speak of their fellow-creatures. But there's some truth in the tales."

"Which tale—the American heiress hunt, or the claimant to the throne?" she asked

"Perhaps in both. I can certify, from my own knowledge, that he was much seen at American houses this winter, and was very attentive to young ladies who are said to be heiresses—as attentive, that is, as his cold and haughty temperament permitted him."

"You're no friend of the prince, M. Coppée."

Coppée smiled again, "His friend! The proud man would not have that. The abyss is too wide. But he interests me as a problem in heredity, and our relations were always pleasantly polite. I could tell you something more; but perhaps it's better that I should not speak of it."

"Of what?"

"Oh, a story—a little service I was able to do him; but let's leave it."

"You make me curious. Tell me. I insist."

Coppée bowed. "You remember the Dormans?"

Nicoline nodded.

"The fellows preyed on him, although you could see how far from brilliant his circumstances were. He had sold his house and taken a furnished apartment. But even so, they could not let him alone, and continued to act

the parasite. I could not see it go on, although I know it is foolish to interfere in other people's affairs. I learnt that these nice brothers had played him a very nasty trick. They told him that a young American, whose acquaintance he had made at a subscription ball, was madly in love with him, but that her parents and brother would not hear of an alliance with a poor European prince. She wrote to him, and he replied. She sent him her photograph, and he sent his in return. The correspondence was carried on by means of the young lady's maid, who had to be largely rewarded. It went on for some weeks. Then it happened that the maid left the American family, and went to an artist of the 'Variétés,' a friend of mine. She soon began to chatter, and told how she had played a part in a farce which was being carried on with a rather stupid German prince. His friends gave her love-letters to him to copy, which she sent him, and he replied. It was amusing at first, but it lasted too long, and began to get wearisome. My friend questioned her, and learnt who the German prince was, and who were his friends. She knew that I was acquainted with Prince Siegfried, and told me the whole story red-hot. I then questioned the young woman, for I wanted to find out what she had done with Prince Siegfried's love-letters. She had given them up to the Dormans, and she was sorry, because she understood they were valuable. We forbade her to continue the deceit, and she was quite ready to break with the Dormans, for she was not at all pleased with them; for they had all along promised her a reward, but had not kept their word. I asked myself why the Dormans had acted like this. My first idea was that they meant to extort money, and so the prince's letters that were in their possession would come in useful. I learnt later that I was mistaken. The wretches had only set the business on foot in order to swindle the poor prince out of the few louis he gave them for the maid, money which they kept for themselves. I determined to protect the prince from these curious friends. I invited the Dormans to my friend's house, confronted them with the maid, and asked them to give up the

letters. At first they took a very high tone, but that availed nothing with me, as you may well imagine, mademoiselle. Then they declared that they had burnt the letters. I did not believe that, and decided, therefore, to reveal the trick to the prince. At first he was greatly ashamed, then broke out into a veritable fury—uttered threats against the Dormans, which, had they been carried out, would have cost him some thousands of francs. I feared I had set more mischief afoot than I had intended, and did what I could to calm the raging prince. It seems that I had no success. It came to an ugly conflict between the prince and the two rascals. I am told that he called them to account, and gave them a horsewhipping. They did not boast about it, but it became known, and was even published in some scurrilous newspaper, Soon after, Prince Siegfried vanished, leaving no certain information behind him."

Nicoline did not interrupt him in his long tale, which he told with evident enjoyment. She thanked him for his interesting information, and dismissed him without further inquiries.

His story made a very strong impression on her. Notwithstanding all the careful detail, she did not quite believe it. Siegfried owed her nothing but honesty. That had been expressly arranged between them. If he loved her, how could he be carrying on adventures with Americans? If he did not love her, why did he not tell her so, as he had promised? And why should he marry an American? Because of her money. She, Nicoline, was certain to be earning in a few years four or five hundred thousand marks a year, and that would surely be enough for him. Or did he prefer to be supported by an heiress rather than by an artist? That must be it. But then, according to their compact, he ought to give her formally her freedom. Was she, was his word so little to him, that he did not think it worth the trouble to write a few lines: "Nicoline, I release you from your promise, and take back mine?" Her pride refused to let her think that for a moment. She knew Siegfried to be weak and selfish, and had always been indulgent

regarding those imperfections of his character. She refused, however, to believe that he was capable of a mean act, for she had as high an opinion of his blood as of her own. She did not confess it, but felt dimly that it was his descent which, together with his handsome face and figure and his love for her, that attracted her and kept her true to him. Could he be false to his origin? No, no. Coppée's gossip could not be true—at least, not entirely. She gave Siegfried the benefit of the doubt. She must wait until he explained. Till then their contract remained binding.

It gave her a certain satisfaction when the post returned her her letter to Siegfried. Her imagination began to work. He had mysteriously hidden himself, in order one day to come brilliantly forth with brave deeds behind him—perhaps really with a crown on his head. Why should a Meissen-Loewenstein-Franka not be capable of that?

In London, where Mr. Grün had rented a splendid flat for her in a big building in the neighbourhood of Whitehall, she became a society lion. The impresario did what he could to bring that about; but Nicoline made it peculiarly easy, for she was specially adapted to make a "sensation." Was she not a step-daughter of a veritable prince of the blood, of a brother of a reigning Grand Duke, and of a brother-in-law of a king, and almost a relative of the native royal family? People who made her acquaintance might hope some day to knit up relations with his royal highness, or, at least, with his morganatic wife. What an excitement! What enchantment! And her charming, strong personality! Heroic legends had preceded her arrival in England. When both the European and American newspapers published accounts of her triumphs at Diesa, and also the story of her mother's marriage to Prince Johann, Nicoline's American fellow-pupil felt sure she had a famous acquaintance, and began to boast about her. She became, for the correspondent of one of the chief New York papers, an inexhaustible source of interesting anecdotes about the new star, of whom the public could not read enough. She told him the story of the revolver and the Levantine. She exaggerated and embroidered

shamelessly. The journalist concocted a story, in the style of the romancers of the wild west, that made the blood run cold—a night surprise, a desperate life-and-death struggle, mortal wounding of the good-for-nothing assailant. The tale, of course, found its way across the Atlantic, and was reprinted in the London daily and weekly papers. Everybody read it, and Nicoline appeared to all in the light of a lovely maiden, beautiful in the privacy of home, brave in battle, a terror to her enemies, a delight to her friends, the embodiment of the English ideal of woman. Her photograph sold in thousands. The enthusiasm was so great, that tickets for her first performance became as valuable as shares on the Stock Exchange, and the object of wild speculation. She did not need to be either the beautiful woman nor the great artist she was to secure a tremendous reception. But it did not harm her chances of success that she should be a heroine after the heart of the English, that she should hypnotize the snobs through her connection with royalty, and charm connoisseurs by her wonderful voice, her admirable acting, and her dazzling beauty.

Since their separation, mother and daughter daily exchanged telegrams, and, after her first performance, Nicoline wired—

"Success almost intoxicating. Press entirely kind. Grün says, 'She came, sang, and conquered; London lies at her feet.' Why were you not there? That was wanting to my happiness. Am well and happy. Kisses for both. NICOLINE."

On her first free evening, the German Ambassador gave a dinner in her honour, and invited the most distinguished persons in London society. Nicoline did not speak English, but spoke French perfectly. She sat at dinner on the left of the ambassador. On his right was an English duchess. Nicoline's neighbour was Mr. Edwin Mallock Gray, an American, and the duchess's younger brother, who had expressly asked for the privilege, although, according to the strict order of precedence, he had no right to that position. But when Mr. Gray made a request, it was not,

as a rule, refused, if it was possible to grant it. For he was one of the greatest capitalists in the United States, a millionaire himself and connected with millionaires, coal-king of North America, engaged in a campaign that would make him indiarubber king of both hemispheres: in short, one of the powers of the world.

Mr. Gray had learned German at Harvard, and, after the completion of his studies in America, had spent two years at German high schools, and so spoke German fluently. He was possibly about thirty-five, but it was not easy to judge his age from his appearance. In repose he looked older, in animated talk, younger. He was a typical American to look at; tall, thin, almost lanky in figure, a clean-shaven face, his fair hair, sprinkled with grey, parted at the side, a massive chin, hard mouth, proud, imposing brow, but remarkably soft, dreamy, brown eyes, which gave his face at times an almost paradoxical, gentle expression. Nicoline learned later that his eyes and certain peculiarities of temperament were inherited from his Irish mother.

When the ambassador introduced Mr. Gray, he added, after mentioning his name, with a courteous smile, "Industry captain."

Nicoline, who knew neither the term nor its signification, thought that she had not understood the first half of the expression, and judged by the last that the stranger held some sort of military rank. She therefore addressed her neighbour as "captain," a circumstance that greatly amused him.

His whole conversation was an homage, but his remarks were always in good taste, to the point, and never clothed in meaningless phrases. He congratulated her on her unusual talent, mentioned the indelible impression that the three parts she had as yet filled had made on her hearers, and remarked as if in parenthesis—"I was one of them each time." He asked about her future creations, and whether there was any chance of her visiting America.

"I think my impresario means to take me there at the end of September.

"You will have even a greater triumph in America. We are a nation that knows how to appreciate perfection."

"You exaggerate, captain."

He smiled. "That is hardly my way."

"I am very far from considering myself perfect," said Nicoline. "He who takes his art seriously, has a high ideal, and must despair of ever reaching it."

"Modesty is a passive, not an active virtue. Supposing that you are sincere."

"Captain!"

"I say, supposing you to be sincere, modesty in such a case as yours proves that you do not sufficiently know your powers. What would you say of a field-marshal who did not know the number and value of his troops?"

"Forgive the discourtesy of another question. What would you think of a field-marshal who chattered about the number and value of his troops to the enemy?" asked Nicoline.

"But I am not your enemy," said Gray, softly, and with singular warmth.

That was as much as good manners permitted at a first meeting, less through the words than the tone. She was displeased, and became cold and monosyllabic. Her neighbour observed it, and spoke of impersonal things: the season, London and New York theatres, music, European and American landscape. It struck her how he divided his conversation into two classes of subjects: the things he knew, which he spoke with authority, and those he did not know, about which he modestly asked for instruction. His opinions were like coins of the worth of which there could be no doubt. He made it quite clear that he recognized the competency of his interlocutor to answer his inquiries, and that he expected from him accuracy and sincerity. He spoke in a low tone, like a man who never found it necessary to shout or to interrupt others in order to gain a hearing, and who had no need to emphasize his words in order to recommend them to his listener's attention. Hitherto her uncle was the only person that Nicoline had heard speak with equal authority, but she had never received

from any man a similar impression of intellectual superiority.

In the drawing-room, after dinner, she saw how her neighbour, when he left her side for a moment, was surrounded, and how respectful was the attention paid him by all, even by the ladies; he was always the centre of changing groups, and she thought to herself she must have misunderstood. It was impossible that the gentleman was a captain; he must be a general at the very least. Mr. Gray began decidedly to interest her; she would have liked to find out who he really was, but there was no one present whom she knew sufficiently well to ask.

His sister, the duchess, came over to her, and talked to her in bad French. It struck Nicoline that during the whole evening Mr. Gray had not once referred to her parents—her first experience of the kind since her arrival in London. It annoyed her a little, while at the same time it impressed her, and left her in doubt whether her origin was unknown to him, or whether the democratic pride of an American republican made the matter of no interest. The duchess, on the other hand, inquired about his royal highness, her father, about the Diesa Court, a little about the baroness, her mother; asked if her father was coming to London, and invited Nicoline to call on her and bring her parents should they be with her.

Mr. Gray joined them, and asked Nicoline, "When are you at home?"

"I have not fixed any day, chiefly because I have no free time."

"May I call on you all the same?" asked Gray.

She looked at him. His soft, imploring eyes fascinated her. As she hesitated, the duchess said—

"I will come with my brother. Fix a day and hour after next Wednesday."

Nicoline named the following Sunday afternoon, for on that day there would be neither a rehearsal nor a performance."

"Six days! That's a long time," murmured Gray. "But I hope to see you at my sister's before that, and to hear you at the theatre at least four times."

"At least! at most!" exclaimed Nicoline.

"You are thinking of the fatigue of singing; I of the enjoyment of listening."

Nicoline wished to leave the embassy early and quietly. Mr. Gray, who did not lose sight of her for a moment, discovered her wish, and accompanied her to her carriage.

When Mr. Grün came to see her at his usual hour the next day, the first question she asked him was if he knew Captain Gray.

"Captain Gray? A very ordinary name. What is he? An English officer in the Guards?"

"No; an American. If he's an officer I can't say, although he was introduced to me as 'captain'—the Duchess of Berkshire's brother."

"Oh!" exclaimed the impresario, "Mr. Edwin Mallock Gray! Of course I know him. Everybody knows him. He's one of our biggest millionaires; the third or second richest man in the United States!"

"Oh, now I understand," said Nicoline. "But what does 'captain' mean?"

'You musn't attach any importance to that. We Americans are not republicans and democrats for nothing. With us every millionaire must belong to a noble family, and every bi- or tri-millionaire must descend from a royal house, and every citizen must have a title. Perhaps Mr. Gray is in a militia regiment; or he bears the title as the owner of a yacht."

"Does Mr. Gray live in London?" asked Nicoline.

"I don't think so. He is probably here for a holiday. For such men, with their immense plans and world-embracing operations, the fever, and fret, and hurry of European capitals mean repose and rest. But it is quite possible that he came over to hear you."

"No!"

"Oh yes! We worked over there enough for you, to rouse people's interest, and Mr. Mallock Gray is known to be a musical enthusiast. He has founded splendid conservatoires in three towns, and often arranges operatic performances merely for himself and his friends in which

the greatest European *prima donnas* and tenors take part. Unfortunately, I have not succeeded in coming into relations with him."

"Are you anxious to do so?" inquired Nicoline.

"Very much so," replied Grün.

At that moment the maid entered with a sealed packet that had been brought by an old gentleman. He asked for a receipt.

Nicoline, in much curiosity, tore off the paper, and discovered a jewel-case. She opened it, and found a wonderful diamond necklace. There was a card on which she read: Mr. Edwin Mallock Gray "begs Fräulein Nicoline von Aseid to do him the honour of accepting this small token of his admiration, and of gratitude for the pleasure her art has given him."

Nicoline turned very red. In her first excitement, almost without knowing what she was doing, she handed the jewels and the card to Grün.

"Good Heavens!" escaped him. And he hurriedly added, "I beg your pardon. That's just like him. You sing pearls, and he thanks you with diamonds. That is the way in which a millionaire expresses his enthusiasm. These stones represent a fortune."

She had listened in silence. She thought of her mother. Then she went to the writing-table and wrote on her card: Nicoline von Aseid "thanks Mr. Gray for his attention, but cannot permit any gifts to be offered her except flowers."

She had the messenger summoned. It was the jeweller himself. She handed him the case and an envelope containing the card, and asked him to deliver both to the sender.

Grün was a silent witness of this scene, and tried not to betray what he thought of it.

Nicoline sang that evening. When she reached the theatre she found her dressing-room transformed into a conservatory, in which the rarest and most magnificent orchids, precious exotics of all kinds, filled every free space. She was no connoisseur, but she guessed that these rare flowers represented a fortune. No card named the donor,

but that was not necessary. And she had formally permitted, almost asked for, this Crœsus-like homage! She was annoyed with herself, and regretted that she had been moved to imitate her mother. When she appeared on the stage, flowers were showered on her from all parts of the house so thickly that the servants, to the great sensation of the audience, had partly to clear them away before the performance could begin. At the conclusion of each act she was presented from the wings with enormous wreaths and bouquets. Gray did not show himself. Nicoline was so distracted by all this that she had to pull herself together in order not to spoil her part.

The next afternoon she called on the Duchess of Berkshire. Mr. Gray was there; he greeted Nicoline respectfully, and made no allusion to what had happened. It was the duchess who asked with perfect unconcern—

"Tell me, mademoiselle, what difference do you see between jewels and flowers?"

Nicoline was irritated with herself for blushing, strove against her embarrassment, and made a brave effort to keep cool and calm.

"A difference in value, duchess."

"Is that it? But that's of no importance to my brother."

Gray did not seem to have heard these remarks. "You must forgive me, Fräulein," he said, "for not hitting your taste at once. I did not know that you preferred flowers to precious stones. You are certainly right. Flowers are more beautiful."

"I want you," added the duchess, "to accept the necklace from me. You won't refuse me the little souvenir."

She rang the bell and gave an order to the man who answered it. The butler immediately brought the case, and the duchess insisted that Nicoline should accept it in due form. Nicoline asked Gray not to send flowers again to the theatre.

"Your command is a law to me," he said, with a bow. And then added, smiling, "Laws must be strictly interpreted."

She did not then understand what he meant, but she discovered later. He sent no more flowers to the theatre, but her house was daily lavishly supplied with fresh flowers by a first-rate florist.

On Sunday afternoon, according to arrangement, the duchess returned Nicoline's visit. To her surprise, she was accompanied by the duke. She made a few commonplace remarks, but did not stay long. When she got up, she said hurriedly, in a low voice—

"My brother intends to call on you. Be kind to him, mademoiselle, he deserves it." She pressed her hand and looked into her eyes.

Nicoline was much disturbed. What did these remarks, this recommendation mean? Why had not Gray come with his sister? She began to regard his visit with suspicion, and her strong heart was seized with an unknown feeling of oppression.

She had not long to wait. When Gray was announced, Nicoline went to meet him, and gave him her hand. After answering a few questions about her health, Nicoline said—

"Mr. Gray, you've turned my house into a flower-garden."

"You allowed me to send you flowers."

"I did not mean it like this. I must ask you to discontinue the kindness."

"Why are you so cruel? You will not listen to what the flowers whisper to you."

Nicoline frowned, and said curtly, "I don't understand the language of flowers."

"Then let me translate. The flowers say: 'He who sends them, changes your house into a garden of flowers: won't you do the same for him?'"

"I am to send you flowers?"

Gray bit his lips, and replied softly, "Be as kind as you can be roguish."

"I understand you less than ever, Mr. Gray."

He was silent for a little while, and seemed to consider. Then he looked up and said in firm tones—

"You are right. I don't see why I should treat an

important affair in my life less seriously than my usual business which does not touch me so closely. So, without the language of flowers, and without metaphor, will you be my wife, and make me happy?"

Nicoline started back in her chair, turned crimson, and with a nervous laugh said—

"You don't lose much time, Mr. Gray."

"Lost time is the one thing on earth that can't be recovered. I humbly beg for your answer. Will you be my wife?"

Nicoline became very serious, and answered with a voice trembling with emotion—

"Your question is a surprise, I was not prepared——"

"And you need time for consideration. That I understand, although I am sorry. Only tell me that you've no antipathy towards me. Then I will wait. Only not long, not long, I implore you. Life is so short."

Nicoline looked down. She stammered out the words from her trembling lips.

"You've not rightly understood me, Mr. Gray. I need no time for consideration. That won't alter things. I'm not free."

"Not free," exclaimed Gray. "You are engaged?"

Nicoline shook her head.

"Then—in love?" asked Gray.

"I have pledged my word," she replied dully.

Gray seized her hand, which she hesitatingly drew away.

"If you've pledged your word, you've done so without love. Everything you say proves that. I'm right, am I not?"

Nicoline said nothing.

"My dear Fräulein von Aseid," he begged, "trust me, tell me the whole truth. Have your parents arranged a marriage for you?"

"It's not that. It's a complicated story. Absolve me from telling it you. I have given my word, and I can't take it back."

"Who is the man who stands in my way?"

"The best shot in the world."

"An American, then," said Gray, surprised.

Although she felt so serious, Nicoline could not help smiling at this naïve outbreak of American pride.

"No; a German."

"But who is he?"

"There would be no point in mentioning his name," said Nicoline.

"I'm ready to fight for you, if need be. But I must, at least, know my rival. If he's the better man, then I must yield. That is just. Only he must prove it."

An iron determination made itself felt in his voice. He bit his lips hard. His usually soft brown eyes flamed with a dull glow. She had the feeling that it would be difficult for any one to get the better of this man in a struggle. She could not subdue his latent strength.

"I do not allow myself to be fought for," she said firmly. "I'm not a passive booty of war."

He said nothing, and a long, uncomfortable silence ensued. At last he broke it with—

"Then there's no hope for me?"

"I'm not free," she replied softly.

"But, in Heaven's name!" he exclaimed passionately, "you're not engaged, not in love, not promised by your parents—what binds you?"

"My word."

"We're turning in a circle. We get no further. At least, tell me how and why you gave your word?"

"Don't press me, Mr. Gray; I'll be greatly indebted to you for your forbearance."

He let his eyes, which were very sad, rest on her beautiful bent face, seemed to reflect, then suddenly got up, made a deep bow, and said—

"I obey. I will always obey you, but be a kind mistress."

When he had gone, Nicoline gave orders that she was at home to no one, went into her bedroom, drew the curtains, and so changed the sunny May afternoon into

twilight, threw herself on the sofa, shut her eyes, and sat in judgment on her feelings. Here was a crisis which decided her life. Was she right to refuse Gray? A soft voice whispered that she had not refused him, that out of the "No" spoken aloud, he had heard a timid "Yes," and would not consider himself dismissed. If he came back—what then? Where did her heart lead her? She was not in love with Gray. She thought she was quite clear about that. She did not feel for him what she had read about in her favourite poets. But perhaps the poets did not speak the truth. Or perhaps girls feel differently from men poets; or she was not one of those who could entirely lose herself in a man she loved. She was certainly not indifferent to him. He interested her immensely, and his passionate feeling—she could not be blind to it—flattered and moved her. Was she, then, more in love with Siegfried than with Gray? Involuntarily she shook her head. Siegfried was much younger and handsomer than Gray, but far below him intellectually. But he was so unhappy; while Gray—she was angry with him that he was so frightfully rich. No, not with him, with herself; because she caught herself being impressed with his wealth, and she considered that a vulgar impulse; because, according to the way of mankind, being discontented with herself, she liked to vent her displeasure on another. Siegfried now had no one on earth except her. If it was true that he was unfaithful to her, of course, he deserved no consideration. But perhaps it was slander. She must not betray him while he, perhaps, was venturing much in thought of her. Oh, if she could only speak to him! But she knew nothing about him. His silence seemed no longer sympathetic, but inconsiderate and cruel.

She thought and thought for hours, until her thoughts became a dream, and she fell asleep exhausted by the excitement. She was awakened by a knock at the door. The maid came in with a letter, which a footman had brought. He was waiting for an answer.

Nicoline went into the sunny boudoir, and read, with eyes which the light hurt—

"DEAR MISS ASEID,

"Will you be very nice? Come and dine with me. I will wait till 8.30. We shall be quite alone, just you and I. I can take no refusal.

"Always yours,

"GLADYS BERKSHIRE."

She hesitated a little. Would the duchess's brother be there? "Quite alone, just you and I." The duchess was not capable of a subterfuge. She wrote in reply—

"MY DEAR DUCHESS,

"Best thanks for your kind invitation. I accept.

"Yours truly,

"NICOLINE ASEID."

When, shortly after eight, Nicoline entered the duchess's drawing-room, she came forward quickly to meet her. She was very simply dressed, and wore no jewelry, except her wedding-ring and the two long diamond ear-rings which she never took off in the house. She pressed both the girl's hands, and said—

"It's very nice of you to have accepted, dear Miss Aseid. Forgive my importunity. But I was so impatient, so nervous. I felt I must see you to-day. Let us go to dinner at once."

She told the servants not to wait, but to put the things on the table, and they would help themselves.

As soon as she and Nicoline were alone, she began without ceremony—

"My brother has told me everything, dear Miss Aseid. It is a great disappointment for him and for me. I do not believe it can be your last word. You have a secret, and do not care to tell it to a man. I understand that. But to me! To a woman! To a sister!"

"Would you really like so much to have me for a sister-in-law, duchess?"

"Oh, indeed I should. You have a fine nature, and my brother loves you sincerely. I do so wish to see him happy. He has had so little happiness in his life! And

he so deserves to be happy! What I can do towards it, I mean to do—to persuade you—convince you. I am ten years his senior. He is my only brother. I can say I brought him up. Our poor mother did not trouble much about us, she was too beautiful and too worldly. Just think, she was killed by a fall from her horse when hunting at the age of sixty-two! Edwin's marriage, too, was a sad mistake."

"His marriage?"

"He married a beautiful, soulless statue in our set. It lasted six years, and was six years of hell. Do you know—as I am an American, and old enough to be your mother, and you are not a silly doll, I may talk to you as to a sensible person—his wife would not have any children because it would spoil her beauty. Edwin put up with it for six years, then he made an end of it."

"Divorced?"

"Divorced. Do you mind that?"

"I beg your pardon—what has it to do with me?" observed Nicoline.

"But it has. You must be Edwin's wife. Through you he would become a happier and better man. I assure you you would develop much good in him. Do say 'Yes,' now at once," returned the duchess.

"Since Mr. Gray has told you everything——"

"Not free! Very well. But Miss Aseid; think for a moment. Do you know that nowadays an emperor's daughter would not refuse Edwin Mallock Gray? Except perhaps if she was passionately in love with another. Is that your case?"

Nicoline was silent.

"Your secret, I must know your secret. Tell me, tell me?" implored the duchess.

"But there is no secret. I can speak out with head erect. I have given my word to Prince Siegfried of Meissen - Loewenstein - Franka - Level," said Nicoline, simply.

The duchess looked at her in surprise. "Who is he? Prince Siegfried of Meissen. Oh! forgive me, I don't know the Almanach de Gotha by heart."

"You wouldn't find him there."

"What? he's not in the Almanach de Gotha?"

"No, for he's not actually Prince of Loewenstein-Franka—or how shall I put it, he is actually, but, so it appears, not legally. He is the issue of the morganatic marriage of a Prince of Loewenstein-Franka and a Baroness von Gronendal, and is not recognized by the Grand Ducal family of Loewenstein-Franka."

"Oh, these morganatic marriages," exclaimed the duchess. "It is incomprehensible how you European women can countenance such things. A woman, if she is pretty and well educated—she need not even be too well educated—is the equal in birth of any man, indeed, she is superior to any man, were he a hundred times king or emperor. I am ashamed of European women. They do no honour to our sex. Only wait. We Americans will abolish the barbarity of these morganatic marriages——" She suddenly stopped, hesitated, and added in confusion, "I beg your pardon, Miss Aseid, I had forgotten your mother."

"Don't apologize. I am entirely of your opinion. My mother has always been an uncrowned queen. She did not insist on the title out of pride. But so far as I am concerned, I should regard it as a serious offence if any one ventured to come to me with any morganatic nonsense. You are quite right," concluded Nicoline.

"Bravo! But now to the matter in hand. What is your prince, who is no prince, doing? Where is he?" asked the duchess.

"I don't know."

"You don't know where your *fiancé* is?"

"He is not my *fiancé*."

"But, Miss Aseid, don't talk to me in riddles. You have given your word, and are not engaged. How is that to be understood?"

"The prince—or whatever you like to call him—asked me to marry him when I was studying in Paris. He was so terribly alone in the world, without brothers or sisters, his father was dead, his mother ill, and not very fond of him—since then, she is dead too—son of one of the

greatest houses in the world, and yet without a family; standing very near the proudest throne and yet an outsider without position or profession, a thorn in the flesh of his nearest and dearest, a laughing stock to people in general—all this awoke my sympathy. But I would not formally engage myself. I wished to remain outwardly free in order to win a place for myself in the world by my own efforts," confessed Nicoline.

"A brilliant place which princesses might envy," interposed her grace.

"You are very kind. And so I said I can't give you my hand yet, but I pledge you my word that I will not engage myself to another until—well until either you can give me an assured position, or"—her voice became lower —"until you release me from my promise."

"H'm, well. And you don't know where the gentleman is?"

"No. He may be in America."

"May! Doesn't he write to you?"

"No. He's probably preparing some surprise."

"How long have you lost sight of him?"

"Since I left Paris. Let us say since October."

The duchess got up. Neither had eaten much. She took Nicoline's arm, and led her on to the terrace in front of the dining-room and sank down beside her on a divan. The western sky glowed red with the remains of the sunset. The Sunday crowds in Hyde Park spread far beneath them. Berkshire House was in Park Lane, and the street lamps blinked at them through the light evening mist.

"Nicoline," said the duchess, fondly and warmly, "you're a child. I know the world and life. Believe me, this prince does not love you, and you do not love him. His fate touched your imagination and your kind heart. You only pitied him, and nothing more. But you're too precious to bestow yourself as alms. Let the prince go, it won't make him unhappy. But you will make my brother happy if you give him your hand."

Nicoline slowly shook her head. "I cannot break my word."

"Rather break a heart, a warm, honest heart full of love for you."

"My heart, but not my word. To break my word would make me terribly unhappy. No; so long as he does not set me free——"

"He will set you free," eagerly exclaimed the duchess, "he must. He takes no interest in you. Or he would not leave you for months without news of him. You really mean it that you don't know where he is?"

"I have been told that he may be in America."

"Let my brother take the matter up. If he's there he will find him. And as you insist on it, he shall formally release you."

"Do you think he can be bought?"

"I don't think, I know."

"Oh, duchess!"

"Call me Gladys. You don't know, you don't know yet what money is, a great deal of money—*très, très beaucoup d'argent*" she said in her ridiculous French.

"Would Edwin give me up to another for *très, très beaucoup d'argent?*" asked Nicoline.

"That's not the same thing. No one in the world has money enough to attract him."

"But if some one had——"

"Let us keep to facts. You must be my sister-in-law. Say yes. And give Edwin the right to do what is necessary to set your conscience at rest."

In Nicoline's inmost heart it was as when the waves beat up against a reef.

"Mr. Gray may try to find the prince. But if the prince does not release me, then I am bound and remain bound."

"How can you be the slave, the victim of an unconsidered promise?"

"We have only one word, even if it costs us our life."

The duchess did not smile at the pathos in Nicoline's voice. She felt there was something adamant about the girl, against which no one could strike without being wounded.

"Write down the prince's name, Nicoline," asked the duchess.

She hesitated a little, but when the duchess repeated her request, she went in and did it.

"May Edwin go to see you in the meanwhile?"

"I don't know—I think—no, it's better we should avoid each other."

"Don't be hard and cold, Nicoline, for my sake."

"I shall be glad to meet Mr. Gray at your house. He is sympathetic enough not to press me—if it can't be."

The duchess embraced her tenderly. "You will be my sister-in-law," she whispered. She insisted on taking Nicoline home in her own brougham, first going for a long drive in Hyde Park.

In the course of the following week, Nicoline was presented at Court by the German ambassadress; she sang at a Court concert, at which, out of consideration for her parents, no one performed besides herself; in this way it was wished to emphasize the great difference between herself and other artists. After this distinction the full flood of social life broke over her, ready to absorb her. But she defended herself against it bravely and effectually. She refused, almost without exception, on the score of her professional engagements, the invitations showered on her by the aristocracy, and declined all requests to sing at private parties, even at the house of a South African millionaire who offered her a fee of four hundred guineas. Her success in public far exceeded Mr. Grün's wildest hopes. He, nor indeed any other opera impresario, had ever had such a season. Evil tongues certainly began to busy themselves with her reputation. People saw how the Duchess of Berkshire chaperoned her. They heard how at the concert given by Nicoline for the benefit of the German Hospital in London the astonishing sum of three thousand eight hundred pounds had been made, and that a person unnamed, afterwards discovered to be Mr. Edwin Mallock Gray, had paid two thousand five hundred guineas for his seat. People were not wanting who connected that fact with her haughty refusal of the big fees offered her to sing at private houses.

Happily, the futile gossip did not reach Nicoline's ears and spoil the cordiality of her relations with the duchess. She went to see her very often, constantly accompanied her in Rotten Row, and dined with her two or three times a week. She met Gray there almost every time, but he strictly kept the promise made to his sister. He was reserved almost to painfulness, his usual economy of words in conversation was reduced to monosyllables, but his melancholy brown eyes dwelt constantly on her, and appeared to drink in her beauty with an unquenchable thirst.

Meanwhile, he was not idle. No word was spoken between them that made allusion to his wishes and hopes; but the first detectives in London and Paris, the news agencies of the world, the information departments of three London and New York papers, his own business representatives in both hemispheres were working for him. Daily reports were sent him of the results of the investigations which almost from the first followed a special line. The movements of a man leave traces behind in all civilized countries, but generally, no one troubles about them, and they remain unremarked. But they can be made very plain if the sight is fortified by heavy gold spectacles, and the attention held by means of the chink of gold. Thus Franka and Vienna delivered up Siegfried's life-story, that of his parents, of his mother's and father's families, and of his latest adventures in those places. Detailed reports of his doings in Paris were furnished by the police, by Baroness von Gronendal's lawyer, by Siegfried's last landlady—indeed, by all persons with whom he had had intercourse, so that a fairly complete picture of the life he led after his return from Vienna was composed. It was not very satisfactory. In the autumn he had been refused by two American heiresses. He had sold his villa, but scarcely anything remained over of the money so gained. A printer, an almanac publisher, a jeweller, had lodged claims against him founded on notes of hand, and had not been paid. Yet he seemed to have been not entirely destitute, for from October to March he had drawn from a bank seventy thousand francs, which had been sent him

from Vienna. Since February he had been very often seen in the company of some Brazilian adventurers, who represented themselves as political refugees, or voluntary exiles, but who were regarded by the police as swindlers. He left Paris with three of them in the middle of March, and embarked under an assumed name in a *messagerie* steamer bound for Rio Janeiro. Such was the outcome of ten or twelve days, as well as a large photograph of Siegfried, which Gray had procured. He found his appearance less intelligent and less brutal than he had expected, but was repelled by his actions. Yet he scarcely felt for him the dislike customary in a rival; it was rather the contempt of a high nature for a mean one.

To his sister, who was eager to learn the result of the investigations, he merely said, "He is a contemptible creature," and a few days later, "Even if Nicoline won't marry me, she mustn't marry this fellow." Despite her questions, he gave the duchess no details.

They lost trace of Siegfried after his arrival at Rio Janeiro. The police there were not skilful, there were no detective agencies; reference to newspaper correspondents and a bank, produced no results, and so an unproductive fortnight went by.

The last week of May brought Nicoline a great pleasure—a visit from her mother, who, after her return from Italy and a stay in Diesa just long enough to settle into Prince Johann's palace, came to London with her husband and the Princess Hildegard. They stayed at Nicoline's flat. The prince and his daughter travelled incognito as Count and Countess Hunenstein, and did not present themselves at Court.

Her mother found Nicoline looking pale and exhausted; she, on the contrary, found her mother looking splendid, and ten years younger. Prince Johann, too, was all the better for the Italian journey, for the new plan of life, for the peace of mind won after so many struggles with his conscience. He looked pleased and animated, and was less wrapt up in himself, and more ready to interest himself in others than ever before. He allowed the impresario Grün to be introduced to him, and

went to the opera the evening of his arrival in spite of the fatigue of the journey, in order to hear Nicoline, and to rejoice and wonder over her success.

As soon as they got back from the railway-station, Nicoline told her mother many things she had not been able to say in the daily telegram. She told her much of the Duchess of Berkshire, nothing of Gray. She showed her the necklace which the duchess had given her, and allowed her to show it to the prince and Hildegard. The prince looked at the jewels in astonishment, and said—

"The enthusiasm for art in English duchesses is very costly. Her father the emperor, never gave my mother anything so valuable."

He expressed a wish to make the lady's acquaintance, and Nicoline undertook to arrange the introduction. But there was a difficulty. Was the prince, as he was travelling incognito, entitled to exact the first visit? He thought so, but Nicoline feared that an English duke in his own country would not understand such a proceeding. She cleverly found a way out. During an *entr'acte* she asked her parents and the ducal pair to come and see her in her dressing-room, and so mutual introductions were easily and unceremoniously effected. The extraordinary likeness between Nicoline and the prince so surprised the duchess that she nearly showed her astonishment. The prince gallantly asked when he might call on her, whereupon the duke fixed the next day.

So the intercourse began. After the exchange of formal calls, the prince accepted an invitation to dine at Berkshire House on condition that it was a small party. There were only the host and hostess, their heir, the Marquis of Reading, the duke's younger brother, the Earl and Countess Ork, and Mr. Gray. The prince made himself most agreeable. He talked chiefly to Mr. Gray, both because it was easier to talk to him, as he understood German, and because he found him the most interesting of all the persons present. The prince observed that the American democracy no longer upheld the principle of equality, but were creating an aristocracy. Gray replied—

"I see no great difference between a democratic and an aristocratic society. In both the best man wins the prize. Only, in a democracy he must always be ready to compete again if he is challenged, whereas, in your aristocratic monarchy, he wins an inheritance. From the true sportsman's point of view, I think our system is to be preferred."

The prince nodded, smiling. "Yes, yes. That was our system, too, in the beginning of our history, about a thousand years ago. But sons and grandsons find the hereditary possession of the prize pleasanter than continual fresh struggles. Your form of society is a thousand years behind ours. Quite a long distance for a republic that wishes to be in advance of everything."

"That's quite a new idea!" laughed Gray, "surprising, but witty."

That word had not often been used in connection with Prince Johann. Nicoline listened with such delight to their conversation that she did not hear the shy remarks of her neighbour, Lord Reading. How extraordinarily invigorating Gray was! He even made the prince talkative, clever, and full of ideas.

After dinner, Baroness von Aseid noticed Gray's attention to Nicoline and her behaviour, things that naturally impressed themselves on her maternal feelings. She said nothing until they were at home. Then, while the prince and princess were talking over the party in the drawing-room, she took Nicoline into her boudoir, and asked—

"Well, child, what about Mr. Gray?"

Nicoline turned crimson. "What do you mean, mother?"

"You're not truthful. Do you think I'm blind?"

"But, mummy, I assure you——"

"You withhold your confidence now you're independent. That pains me."

There was so much grief in her tone and looks that Nicoline kissed her, and whispered—

"Mr. Gray wants to marry me."

"He has proposed to you?

"Yes."

"Formally?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"Oh! mummy, I can't——"

"Why? You are certainly not indifferent to him."

"I—I—am not in love. I—don't want to hurry. When I give myself—I shall give myself wholly—for life—life is long," said Nicoline.

"Yes. Haste is needless. I do not object to your making sure before you decide. But—why did you not confide this to me?" asked her mother.

"How could I? You were in Italy. You can't put things of that sort in a telegram."

"I thought such a modern young lady as you——"

Nicoline kissed her mother and smiled. But she was not at peace with her conscience. She had not been quite sincere, and she suffered therefore. And yet she could not make up her mind to speak of Siegfried. It seemed to her that the considerations which prevented her accepting Gray were so fragile, so slight that they would not bear being spoken of aloud. They were for others what a cobweb is for men, for her what a cobweb is for a fly.

It was nearly a fortnight since Gray had received the last news from Brazil. Now came a cablegram from Rio containing important information. The correspondent of a New York paper had cleverly tracked the game he was after, and related the following: The pretended prince had gone from Rio to Laguna, and thence to the German Colony of Santa Catharina, and had suddenly circulated printed proclamations in two languages, in which he challenged the adversaries of the republican mal-administration and adherents of the destroyed monarchy to collect round him as a relative of the dethroned dynasty, to turn out the revolutionary destroyers of the country, and to restore the monarchy. Many laughed at the document which left it quite dark whether the alleged Prince of Loewenstein-Franka was working for himself or his cousins. Sensible Germans shrugged their shoulders and took no notice. The governor of Santa

Catharina, however, would permit no jesting, and he issued a warrant to imprison the European adventurer, round whom had collected a few unemployed foreigners and some negroes. Siegfried got wind of it, hurriedly left Blumenau, and took refuge in the forest of the Serrado Mar. Troops were sent in pursuit, and reached him after several day's pursuit; they surrounded the hut in which he was hiding alone, his companions having soon left him in the lurch. After a desperate resistance, in which he killed or wounded several of his opponents, and after being shot through the leg himself, he was smoked out of the hut which had been set on fire, overpowered, bound, and delivered up to the governor. His examination revealed that the young adventurer had been deceived by swindlers who informed him that there existed a widespread monarchical conspiracy in Brazil which only needed an energetic leader to break out. They had given him documents from alleged committees which were found in his possession, and which were ridiculous forgeries. The purpose of the deceit seemed merely to extort money from the simple-minded young man to pay their travelling expenses to Brazil. They accompanied him to Rio and Laguna, but vanished as soon as their victim had printed and circulated the proclamation, of course composed by them. The farce had been played in the second half of April, but had attracted so little notice that only a few local papers had devoted short, contemptuous paragraphs to it, and they had not found their way into the press of the capital. The governor did not take the young man and his doings seriously, but kept him in prison for a month, acquainted the Central Government with the case, in order to learn what connection his title and relationship bore to the dethroned dynasty. Meanwhile, he was accused of breach of the peace, rebellion, armed resistance to the government, and manslaughter. His wound seemed to have been cured.

When Gray received that cablegram he regarded the task which he had set himself as accomplished, and gave all the reports to his sister, with the remark—

"It means sixteen thousand pounds, very much more

than the fellow is worth. Read them, and tell Miss Aseid what you think best."

The duchess read them with the deepest interest, and asked Nicoline to come and see her at once, as she had news of Prince Siegfried. It was the day after the dinner at Berkshire House. Nicoline went without delay. The duchess only showed Nicoline two of the eighteen or twenty reports: those of the Paris detectives about his chase of American heiresses, and the last despatch from Rio, the six hundred words of which meant an outlay of over three thousand marks, and which the duchess translated to her from the English. To the duchess's intense surprise she took the Paris report quite calmly, while the other undoubtedly excited her.

"Are you free now, Nicoline?" asked the duchess, when she finished the despatch.

Nicoline slowly shook her head.

"What can bind you to a man who has betrayed you?" exclaimed the duchess, in astonishment and indignation. "Haven't you understood it?"

"Yes," said Nicoline, softly; "but perhaps it's only gossip."

"Gossip! The American families made inquiries through agencies as to the prince's circumstances!"

"That only shows that he interested them. People imagine so much for which there is no ground. I cannot bring myself to judge any one unheard," said Nicoline.

"He is lying in a Brazilian prison——"

"I will set him free, and give him the opportunity of hearing what is said of him, and telling me the truth. Then my duty will be ended." She spoke in a low voice, but so firmly that the duchess did not press her farther.

Nicoline drove home, and waited with the utmost impatience for her parents' return; they had gone to a picture-gallery. She told them the story of Siegfried's Brazilian adventure and its unlucky ending, and asked Prince Johann to procure his release from prison.

"God forbid!" grumbled the prince. "Always

thought young Gronendal a fool. Thought it would end like this."

"If a man lacks guides, you can't reproach him if he goes astray. That Siegfried is now in a Brazilian prison is the fault of the family that disowned him. I implore you, father, say a good word for him."

"But what's it to do with you?" asked the prince, sharply.

"I knew him in Paris. I saw his forlornness, his weakness, and it made me very sorry. Be kindhearted, father."

"The Franka and Vienna Level people are nearer to him. He should appeal to them."

"They would not trouble themselves about him. You know that, father."

Baroness von Aseid had listened most attentively and had closely observed Nicoline. She did not understand her daughter, did not see at what she was driving, but felt some great desire in her words, and that was sufficient. She came to Nicoline's aid, and supported her request. Prince Johann had renounced the habit of resisting them. After suitable hesitation, he sourly gave in, and desired Nicoline to prepare a brief written statement of the affair which she gave him before she went to the theatre.

The prince was uncertain how to act. Should he appeal to his brother? or to the Grand Duke Hilarius? or to the Vienna duke? or simply recommend the young man to the Foreign Office? perhaps write to the emperor? It was three days before he came to a decision. At last under pressure from the ladies, he decided for a private letter to the Chancellor, and promised to send it the next day.

But the next day was the Derby day, and he had no time, for he had accepted a place on the Duke of Berkshire's four-in-hand to drive to Epsom. The party consisted, besides the duke and duchess, of the prince and the princess Hildegard, the baroness, Nicoline, Lord Reading, and Mr. Gray.

The duchess put Nicoline between herself and Mr. Gray. On the way, while the prince was absorbed in the landscape, she said in a low voice to Nicoline—

"Prince Siegfried is released from prison."

The colour flamed in Nicoline's face. "Have you had news?" she asked in surprise.

"A cable arrived in the night. My brother asked the governor of Santa Catharina to temper justice with mercy, and he has given your *protégé* his freedom on his written promise to leave Brazil at once, and never to return without permission from the Government.

"You have done this, Mr. Gray?" she asked, giving him her hand.

"Since you wished it," he replied, gently pressing it. His brown eyes were more melancholy than ever.

For the first time she responded to the pressure of his hand. A slight tremor went through the strong man.

Before her father, a royal highness, could decide at which end to take hold of the matter, Mr. Gray, quietly, without fuss, had settled it in his cold, practical way.

The duchess roused her from the silence into which she had sunk by the low, pressing question—

"You are free now then, since you've fulfilled your last duty?"

"Not yet. I must have an interview with the prince. Mr. Gray, I have a last request to make of you. I should like to telegraph to the prince that I want to see him. I don't know where to send it, for perhaps he has already left Brazil, and is on the high seas. But you rule our little globe. It will certainly be easy for you to find him. Will you?"

"I will do what you wish."

"Do I pain you, Mr. Gray?"

"Do you pain yourself?"

"Yes," she said softly.

He pressed her hand again, longer, more warmly than before, and no word was spoken between them. Arrived on the race-course, she pencilled the short message on a leaf of her note-book, and gave it to Gray.

The prince returned to town, greatly pleased with his day. In the evening Nicoline told him that he need not trouble any more about Siegfried, as Mr. Gray had effected his release from prison.

"These Americans! They're the very devil!" was all the prince murmured. But he seemed much pleased to be relieved of the affair.

Nicoline's parents and half-sister left London four days later. The prince had, however, accepted an invitation from Mr. Gray to make an excursion with him on his yacht in August to the Norwegian coast, and perhaps to Iceland. Nicoline, in a last talk with her mother, told her she was arranging an interview with Siegfried in order to make her position clear. Her mother, in sudden uneasiness, asked Nicoline why this was necessary, and whether there was anything between them that she did not know. Then Nicoline made a full confession. Baroness von Aseid considered Nicoline overstrained; she believed in Siegfried's treachery, and declared that the characterless man deserved no place in her thoughts. But Nicoline replied that she knew she was acting rightly, and that she must be left alone. Her mother, seeing that she was not to be moved, anxiously took leave of her.

The theatrical season came to an end six weeks later, and Grün gave Nicoline her freedom till September 20th.

After a stay of ten days at Diesa, Nicoline and her people were fetched by Mr. Gray and the Berkshires, who had an excellent reception at Court, and taken by special train to Kiel, where they embarked on the steam yacht *Carlotta*. Baroness von Aseid was astonished that the beautiful ship should bear her name, and asked its owner if he had a relative called *Carlotta*. He smiled slightly, and said "Yes, baroness." Much later she learned that the ship had formerly been called *Columbia*, and had received the new name only a short time before this expedition.

It was the 6th of August. The yacht was at Drontheim, where an enormous number of letters awaited them. There were letters and newspapers even for Nicoline. When she spread them out on the table in the saloon, the sight of the writing on one of the envelopes made her utter a low exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked her mother, who was sitting by her.

"Nothing, nothing," replied Nicoline, quickly.

The letter was addressed to "Fräulein Nicoline Flammert, Diesa, Germany," with "To be forwarded" twice underlined. It bore a Belgian stamp, and the postmark, "Andenne, 30 July." She opened it in some agitation, and read—

"DEAR NICOLINE,

"I found your telegram from London when I landed at Southampton on June 19th. It was forwarded to me from Brazil, where it arrived after my departure. It struck me like a blow, for it revealed to me my heavy offence against you.

"Yes, Nicoline, I have treated you very badly. But you will forgive me on account of my repentance and atonement. It is only one of the many faults I have committed in life, but it's the worst, and the one that most clearly shows me my worthlessness.

"Don't be vexed that I did not grant your wish and go to see you. The meeting would have been painful for both. Let me now in writing bid you farewell for life.

"I was in terrible despair after my last crisis. I had loved you, and yet my love was not strong enough to keep me from being unfaithful. I wanted to raise myself in my own eyes by some deed, and I learnt that I was weak and incapable. I trusted men, and discovered that they had shamelessly deceived and plundered me. I will not name them. I have forgiven them, and forget their names. I found everywhere, in myself, as in others, only evil and sin. I did not know what to do in this world where I was nothing, had nothing, could do nothing. Filled with disgust for myself, thinking of you with shame and self-condemnation, cursing the memory of my parents, I saw only one door open to me, a dark, narrow one, with the fires of hell flickering behind it.

"The Lord and Saviour and my patron saints showed me at the right moment another door, through which, with the Lord's mercy, I hope to reach happiness. I have been a lay brother for five weeks in this Camaldolite monastery of St. Gregory, and hope, as soon as the rule permits,

through the kindness of the Prior and the Brothers, to take the vows.

"Here I shall find the peace that the world denied me. I already feel a foretaste of it in my sadly tortured soul. I think of my father, from whom I only inherited lack of talent, without bitterness, as of my mother from whom I have only pride, and a leaning towards the vanities of this world, and of my family, who seem to have remembered me in my misfortune. I have to thank them for the European intervention in my favour, of which the Brazilian Government told me, and for five hundred pounds which was handed to me when I left the prison. I wrote to my uncle, the duke, to thank him, and asked him to pay my debts—he would never miss the money—and to allow my mother's brother the small annuity he had been accustomed to have from her. The duke has not answered me, but I hope he will fulfil my request. Your telegram makes me think that perhaps you heard of my attempt, and have, perhaps, interceded for me. If my supposition is correct, I thank you many, many times.

"A monastery is the right place for a poor prince's son, reared with certain claims, and then thrust into the world without support or rights. With the help of God and the saints, I have now found a niche for myself, and shall devote myself to the preparation of my own salvation, until the Lord graciously summons me. What remains to me of mortal life is not too long for that purpose, and also to pray that my parents may be forgiven their faults.

"Forget me, Nicoline, and be happy, as a high, pure, rare creature like you deserves. I must forget you, too, although you are the only being who brought any light into my life. I would transform myself into an angel—if it were not wicked—in order to dare to think of you always.

"The Lord and Saviour bless you!

"Your repentant,

"Siegfried von Gronendal,

"In religion, Brother Guigo."

Nicoline had been obliged to dry her eyes repeatedly

in order to be able to see what she was reading. When she had finished, she gave the letter to her mother who looked through it quickly, kissed her daughter, and said—

"What a happiness for the poor man that he is a Catholic!"

Nicoline then translated the letter to the duchess, who rejoiced exceedingly.

"Then we can announce the engagement at once?"

"No, there is still one thing I must do."

"What is it?"

Nicoline hesitated for some time. At last she said softly, as if ashamed—

"I must go to the Belgian monastery and see the unhappy man."

"Why? That's quite mad."

"No. I must be certain that I bring Edwin a whole heart and soul. As a last proof, a meeting is imperative. I am almost sure that I shall stand it. But I must not feel any doubts."

Edwin was now called in, and hurriedly informed of the new situation. He opened his arms with such an imploring gesture that Nicoline sank powerless on his breast. He held her fast, and covered her soft silky fair hair with innumerable kisses. At last he set her free and said—

"Go to Belgium, if you must. I will go with you. Now, I'll settle things with your father."

"Edwin—not yet—wait until——"

"No. I've had enough of waiting. I'll come back directly."

A minute after he stood under the awning on the after-deck before Prince Johann, and said—

"Your royal highness, I have the honour to ask the hand of your daughter Nicoline."

"Well, I never! Have you spoken to the baroness?"

"Not yet, your royal highness."

"But to Nicoline?"

"Oh yes."

"Does she consent?"

"She has given me permission to speak to you."

The prince stroked his upstanding moustache. "I gladly give you my blessing. You've chosen well, Mr. Gray. A splendid girl—Nicoline!"

"So I've always found. I was not modest. I did not need to be. To the best man, the best wife, and to their children the world! That's my conviction, your royal highness."

"To the best man, the best wife, and the world to their children," repeated the prince, slowly and thoughtfully. Then he added, "Right. Deep. If one is only free to think of one's self. Good principle for beginnings. At the founding of a new dynasty. Well, are you going to buy a small kingdom, somewhere, Mr. Gray?"

The next morning, the *Carlotta* put about, and made straight for Antwerp. The rest of the party stayed on board, while Nicoline, accompanied by Gray, went by special train to the little station of Andenne, whence a carriage took them in half an hour to the monastery, situated high up on the forest-covered hills. Gray remained at the monastery gate, while Nicoline rang, and after a lengthy negotiation with the brother who answered, was admitted to the waiting-room. She succeeded in getting permission to send a written message to the lay brother, Guigo, to the effect: "Nicoline is here, and would like to see you before you take the vows."

She waited a few minutes alone in the bare room. Then the messenger returned, and said in French, with a strong Belgian accent—

"Brother Guigo asks you to excuse him. He is in chapel, and cannot come."

"Not after the service?"

"Not even then. He wishes you a pleasant journey."

"Oh!" She was silent, and thought for a moment. "Can I go into the chapel?"

"Yes—in the gallery."

He showed her the way, and she went up the stairs to the gallery. About twenty monks in white gowns were kneeling in the choir. For a long time she sought in vain. Suddenly she started. The one before the last in the row was Siegfried. The service was over. The

monks and lay brothers rose. In the long gown Siegfried seemed more of a giant than ever, although he avoided stretching himself to his full height by assuming a humble, bent attitude. Nicoline was alone in the gallery, and leaned far over the railings. As he walked behind the rest to the entrance to the choir, Siegfried involuntarily looked up, and his eyes met those of Nicoline. He quickly looked down, felt for his rosary, and without again turning his head, went slowly on. Nicoline looked after him until he disappeared. A cold shudder ran down her back. But it was only the feeling evoked in highly strung temperaments by a serious and solemn drama. The young monk deserved sympathy. But he was a stranger to her. Her strong, sound nature, rejoicing in life, turned from this weak renunciation of the world.

Gray looked at her inquiringly when she came back to him.

"I've seen him," she said. "Everything is settled."

He grasped her hand. "Then you're mine?"

"Wholly and entirely."

To the Belgian coachman's astonishment, he drew her to him in a long embrace.

The wedding took place in September. Gray bought off Grün with a sum that should have satisfied him, had he not, like every speculator, lost all sense of proportion.

The renunciation of her artistic career was a grief to her; but Gray consoled her.

"If you want to sing in the future, you shall do so to an audience of kings, not to people who also like to hear Christy Minstrels. And the listeners shall not pay, but you shall make them the princely gift of your art."

They travelled for three months. Whenever Nicoline asked when they were to settle in a permanent home, he smiled mysteriously, declared he still had business in Europe, and bade her be patient.

They set sail for America after Christmas, and on the last day of December he took her to the house in New York in which she was to rule as queen.

When she saw it, she uttered a cry. "Am I dreaming?"

Before her, imitated in every detail, stood the Grand Ducal Castle of Diesa, in which her father was born.

"How is it possible?" she asked.

"I wanted to give you a little surprise. I hope you are pleased."

"But how could it be done so quickly? It's magic!"

"Quickly? The architect has had seven months since the end of April."

"Since the end of April? That was when you saw me for the first time."

"Yes. I gave my order after that first dinner at the German Embassy, when you called me 'captain.'"

"But I was a perfect stranger to you then."

"I intended you to be mine. And as I wished it, I knew it would be so. Therefore I could confidently build your father's castle here."

On the wall of the largest and most beautiful drawing-room hung portraits of Prince Johann and Baroness von Aseid, the prince's-wedding gift. The frame was surmounted by a crown. Below was an open scroll, with the inscription, "Prince Johann of Diesa to his son-in-law Mr. Edwin Mallock Gray. To the best man, the best wife, and the world to their children!"

THE END

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